

2010

The dialogism of self and other in contemporary American drama

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THE DIALOGISM OF SELF AND OTHER IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN DRAMA

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by
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May 2010

Acknowledgements

This project, inspired by the way humans look at the world, rekindles my passion for a career in academia. I impart my sincerest gratitude to my advisor Dr. Leslie A. Wade, without whose guidance this project would remain only a jumble of shapeless inspirations, and without whose encouragement and support would never have been completed on time. I would also like to thank Dr. Leigh Clemons, Dr. John Fletcher, Dr. Rachel Hall and Dr. Joseph Kronick, who not only pointed out the theoretical limitations of the project but also opened up future potentialities of the work. Last but not least, I would like to show my appreciation to all those who have helped me in my directing work on *Sound of a Voice*, a significant source of illustrative material for this project. I particularly appreciate Dr. Michael Tick, for allowing me to take his advanced-level directing course, and Dr. Femi Euba who helped advise the directing work. I am blessed to have had this experience here, studying and working in LSU's Theatre Department. For me, this will remain a life-long memory.

My thanks also goes to my best friend here in the U.S., Michelle Mouton, who carefully helped me proofread the work and has been the most significant source of emotional support during this endeavor; my friends Fanny Wu and Yu-hsin Hsueh who accompanied me through the most emotionally turbulent days; and many other friends who helped me either emotionally or on technical computer matters. All the toil has paid off, and been balanced with all the fun times we have had together. Finally, I would love to show my deepest thanks to my family who are always there for me whenever I need them, without whose support this work would never have been accomplished.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF ABBREVIATION	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO: INTIMATE ETHICS AND NATIONAL POLITICS.....	28
CHAPTER THREE: HUMAN RELATIONS AND THE FACE OF THE OTHER IN THE PLAYS OF EDWARD ALBEE.....	72
CHAPTER FOUR: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND EPISTEMOLOGY.....	113
CHAPTER FIVE: THE FEMALE AND DESUBJECTIFICATION.....	151
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....	197
WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED.....	216
VITA.....	231

List of Abbreviations

Works of Lévinas

BPW

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Eds. by Adriann T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1996. Print.

DF

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Difficult freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Trans. Seán Hand. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. Print.

EE

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Existence and Existents*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne UP, 2001. Print.

MHO

Lévinas, Emmanuel. Lévinas, Emmanuel. "Martin Heidegger and Ontology." *Diacritics*. 26.1 (Spring 1996), 11-32. Web.

NTR

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Nine Talmudic Readings*. Trans. Annette Aronowicz. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.

OB

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998. Print.

TI

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne UP, 1969. Print.

TOAE

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*. Trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1987. Print.

Works of other authors:

Millennium

Kushner, Tony. "Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part I: Millennium Approaches." *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*. Ed. W.B. Worthen. 5th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2007. 1211-1241. Print.

Perestroika

Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part II: Perestroika*. New York: Theatre Communication Group, Inc., 1994. Print.

SMM

Albee, Edward. *Stretching My Mind*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005. Print.

TDFLH

Chanter, Tina. *Time, Death, and the Feminine: Lévinas with Heidegger*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001. Print.

TKNE

Fisher, James, ed. *Tony Kushner: New Essays on the Art and Politics of the Plays*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2006. Print.

TTO

Peperzak, Adriaan Theodoor. *To The Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue UP, 1993. Print.

UTK

Fisher, James, ed. *Understanding Tony Kushner*. Columbia: South Carolina UP, 2008. Print.

Abstract

This work is interdisciplinary in orientation and brings together American theatre (and culture) and contemporary ethical philosophy. I am introducing the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas and his theory of Self and Other to an analysis of contemporary American drama—a mode of approach that is new to the discipline of theatre studies. Lévinas's insights are particularly relevant to the concerns of the 21st century and how we might rethink relationships and values. My work looks at contemporary American plays in terms of nationalism, gender politics, racial dynamics and ecological issues. I contend that these playwrights are attempting to go beyond conventional views on such matters and are modeling a sort of Lévinasian ethic in their works, one informed by an honoring of difference and a responsibility for the Other.

Chapter One:

Introduction

One of the primary moments of inspiration for this study occurred when I attended a production of Mary Zimmerman's play *Metamorphoses* (produced by Louisiana State University in the fall of 2006). In viewing Zimmerman's reworking of Ovid's texts, which posed questions of myth and science for a contemporary audience, I was greatly stirred and prompted to consider basic questions of how people look at the world, how people relate to one another and to the natural environment. My thinking on these questions was further inspired by my encounter with the scholar Silva Benso and her analysis of the co-existence and interplay of mythos and logos. It was at this point in my coursework (and with the writing of Benso) that I learned of the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas and his unique ideas about the relationship between Self and Other. These various influences led me to look at the world through a new lens and caused me to re-evaluate the contemporary Western value system and its fundamental components, namely, those of logos, reason, and domination, that are central to its reasoning. I began to think of the role that theatre plays in this process as we examine and envision the world. Should theatre seek to "copy" reality or "re-create" an alternate reality for us to model?

In bringing these questions to recent American drama, I gave particular attention to Pulitzer Prize plays after 1995 as indicators of concerns and issues confronted by noted dramatists of the American theatre. In these works I found a preoccupation and fascination with issues of Self-Other relationships—subjects central to the work of Lévinas—and how they were expressed and explored through dramatic means, how philosophical issues were brought to a more personal level. This reading made me wonder how such plays might lead to a reconsideration of ethics, a rethinking of the top-down political totality, as Lévinas proposes. I looked for tendencies of an

alternative ethics and ideas in these plays that might call for a questioning of politics as Lévinas had hoped. Given that much contemporary theatre is of an experimental nature, and that many contemporary American dramas give embodiment to a reconsideration of the Self-Other relationship (in a political totality), this project takes theatre as a lab for testifying to a new ethical relationship—a dialogism between violence and love. Bringing this aspect to light shows how theatre is grappling with issues fundamental to how we see ourselves (how theatre addresses issues central to recent ethical theory), and how the characters and events depicted on stage might point to an ethical pathway into the 21st century.

Focus and Aims

This project is inspired by Lévinas's theory of Self and Other and aims to examine the possible new understandings of Self-Other relationships represented in contemporary American drama. Lévinas's epistemological and ontological reworking of Self-Other relationships is a provocative innovation in philosophical thinking. Unconvinced that reason alone can bring out the best in humankind, he challenged Aristotle's legacy to Western philosophy in that he threw out the problematic assumption that equates epistemology with ontology. Taking into account pressing issues like ecology, nationalism, gender, and race, my study highlights Lévinas's understanding of epistemological and ontological modes that reveal Self-Other dynamics in a new light. Lévinas's ethical consideration of Self-Other relationships points to a collapse of a human-center, the "I"-centered mindset, and in turn encourages a re-examination of these enduring issues.

Attention to Lévinas also offers a new way to consider issues that may indicate a critical impasse or exhaustion. He sheds new illumination on identity politics in particular, which flourished throughout the late twentieth century, where Self-identity is demarcated in terms of nation, gender, sexuality, race, religion, class, region, etc. While identity politics helped to

elevate a multiplicity of identities, and carry on the revolution of deconstructing a despotic norm, it arguably reinforced the conventional Western Self-Other model characterized in terms of a dominant Self and an oppressed Other. The individual is valued in terms of a collective--of nationality, gender, race, culture, etc.--instead of being valued on its own basis. However, such a view does not account for cross-category outreach or a responsibility not based chiefly on self-interest. On the other hand, Lévinas's alternative theories of Self-Other offer us a fresh perspective that redefines subjectivity and invites us to re-examine the relationship between Self and Other in terms of interdependence and responsibility.

In bringing Lévinasian insights into conversation with recent American drama, this project will examine Self-Other relationships in a number of late twentieth and early twentieth-first century plays and will focus on four basic areas of concern: 1) Politics: this section aims to explore the idea of "The Third,"¹ which informs Lévinas's notion of justice and the totalization of politics; 2) Motherhood and Interpersonal relationships: this section chiefly emphasizes ethical responsibility, which Lévinas terms the "first philosophy," on an interpersonal level; 3) Race relations: this chapter explores how Lévinas's notion of Self and Other might shed light on contemporary race theory; 4) Human-environment and human-animal relationships: this final section draws on Lévinas's ideas of "face" to examine relationships between humans and the environment as well as humans and animals.

In sum, contemporary American dramatists have been exploring and articulating issues and problems that confront the world, as it moves into new alignments and social/economic orders. This project investigates the outlooks of key American playwrights, with an eye toward how their plays embody elements that reflect a Lévinasian viewpoint, a view that may offer helpful insight and guidance as we move into a twenty-first century future.

¹ For Lévinas, the "third person" marks the initiation of politics.

Background and Contexts

Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995)

While Lévinas was first known as the translator and introducer of Edmund Husserl's ideas of phenomenology into France, he received a traditional Jewish education in Lithuania; the influence of Talmud only became evident in the later stage of his philosophical thinking. After the age of eighteen, he studied philosophy in Germany (where he met Heidegger) and later studied phenomenology under Edmund Husserl. He then became one of the first French intellectuals who paid attention to these two famous philosophical figures. His later estrangement with Heidegger was due to Heidegger's Nazism, and many of his main publications indicate a rejection of a Heidegger's thinking.

Lévinas's philosophy can be seen as a break from traditional Western rationality or Metaphysics, which he terms "ontology." He proposes that the Other can not be reduced to an ontological understanding, and cannot be treated as an object of the Self (without violence). For him, philosophy is not the "love of wisdom" as the Greeks indicated, but the "wisdom of love," because the ethics that explores Self-Other relationships should be at the fore. In other words, his notion of ethics is not the traditional one, a system that comes after the individual forms its subjectivity. Ethics instead contributes to the process of constructing the Self, making the Self aware of its responsibility toward the Other during the Self-forming process. The Other only reveals its alterity through the Face that demands the Self to prostrate and bow before it.

Lévinas's major works on the Self-Other relationship include *De l'existence à l'existant* (*Existence and Existents*, 1947), *Le Temps et l'Autre* (*Time and the Other*, 1948), *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (*Totality and Infinity*, 1961), *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (*Humanism of the Other*, 1972), and *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 1974).

Contemporary Problems and Concerns

According to recent global warming reports released by NOAA (The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) in 2007, coastal areas of Taiwan will one day be submerged under ocean water 6 to 25 meters deep. The report notes that the cities I grew up in will be under water, and the mountains I used to climb will become islands. During my first year in the United States (2005), I witnessed the ecological and environmental crisis brought on by Hurricane Katrina, an event whose impact, destruction, and aftermath continues to be heavily debated in media discourse, especially with regard to its alleged connection to global warming. Environmental change not only endangers human existence, but also that of animals and the ecological balance of nature as a whole. While discourses about global warming vary, with some believing the world will be destroyed within 100 years, and others minimizing this outlook as another trendy issue that will soon wane, such discussion presents humanity with fundamental questions. How do humans ethically engage the world around them, in terms of personal, political, and ecological relations? And how can humanity balance these relationships in a sustainable way?

If the will-to-power and the pleasure principle act as the chief drivers of human activity, what are the prerequisites for collective happiness? Can the achievement of such collective happiness include happiness for the individual? Can collective interests fairly include those of the individual? Is a balance between the two possible? For instance, recent and unusual fluctuations between flooding and draught in Taiwan are believed by some to be yet another indication of the accumulating effects of global warming, making this issue a practical matter (instead of an abstract philosophical debate). What then should the Taiwanese people do? If they choose to abruptly halt all industry and transportation so as to prevent further emissions of CO₂, the economy will stagnate. If measures are not taken, however, it appears the island will ultimately suffer increasing inundation by rising sea levels.

Consequently, interests of environmental groups and those of industry groups are in conflict with one another. Not only do ecological issues influence and further problematize Self-Other relations (and ultimately human existence), they also reveal conflicts and tensions between opposing ideologies, races, and nations aggravated by economic competition. For instance, in order to speed up consumption, tons of low- quality products are manufactured. As consumption increases, inferior product quality requires inevitable replacement—which further increases production, as business tries to keep up with demand. While this dynamic might lead to economic prosperity in some regions, that prosperity is only temporary. Such a manufacturing cycle often ignores its impact on the local environment. Underlying this dilemma lies a long-term fundamental question of the Self's² relation to its world.

All these pending issues waiting for resolution seem to be beyond the scope and efficacy of the epistemological mode that has dominated the world (at least the Western world) for thousands of years. Western egoism has a long tradition since Plato. It argues for a reason-centered ego in the conception of individuals and communities, and places ethics and morals under the aim of realizing a more prosperous “Self.” This outlook also introduces the significance of defining and fulfilling the “Self” in Western civilization. This model is also at work in the theories of identity politics of the late 20th century: striving for a more just society (a functional ethics), human beings turned to the discourses of gender, sexuality, nationality, race, religion, etc. in the search of “true identity” (the Self). While these are the categorical traits that people have little control over,³ the discourses of identity politics that ask for equal treatment fall into the conventional ethical frame, that is, the ethics that come after the forming of subjectivity

² The “self” here refers to humankind, specifically egoism and its epistemological model.

³ This idea is from a debating board that I think is helpful. (Bikerdad)

and instilled into people through educational means. What our contemporary situation may require is a new way to think about selves and others, and a new way to understand ethics.

Lévinas and the Western Philosophical Tradition

At this critical moment, Lévinas's notion of ethics between Self and Other can seem to provide a glimmer of hope. Lévinas occupies a unique status in the tradition of Western philosophy, specifically concerning his views on rationality. Since Plato argued that only rationality can lead to knowing the world, Western philosophy has honored the foundation of logos. In Plato's ideal state of human existence, as outlined in *The Republic*, the rationality of philosophers ultimately brings people to the good and the truth. Each individual functions as a part to contribute to the wellness of the whole. His student Aristotle consummates the kingdom of rationality with his notion of teleology, emphasizing a human-centered world perspective. According to Aristotle, humans must exercise reason in order to realize their innate purpose, the achievement of happiness. Aristotle equates "how to live" (through reason) with "the purpose of living" (happiness). He believes that through reason humans can find a harmonious manner of life (happiness).

This traditional rationality established in antiquity reached an important conceptualization in Heidegger,⁴ who situated reason within the temporal structure of Being/Dasein⁵ in his *Being and Time*. While both Heidegger and Lévinas contemplated the problem of human existence, their approaches to the resulting ethical dilemma and its possible solutions differed. For Heidegger, we can only know Being (the status of all existence) through beings

⁴ Heidegger actually diverges from the traditional philosophy in his dissent regarding the conventional priority on the "present" and how this temporal understanding determines the interpretations of beings. However, his renewed interpretation of Being was again attacked by Lévinas as self (human)-centered.

⁵ In "The Absent Foundation: Heidegger on the Origin of Rationality," Jussi Backman notes that the idea of reason was brought up in Heidegger's lecture course *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik* (1928; esp. GA 26: 135–285), the essay "Vom Wesen des Grundes" (1929), and the lecture course *Der Satz vom Grund* (1955–56). This article is under review and prohibits quote.

(individual human beings/objects). Created things (beings), i.e., crops, buildings, any piece of furniture, etc. reflect people's own consciousness. People need to make their own instruments in order to avoid reducing their existence to a mechanized one. Ultimately he yearns for a peasant-like lifestyle in which humans create that which they need.

However, for Lévinas, Heidegger does not go far enough in challenging the Western philosophical tradition and its fundamental reliance on reason. He insists that Heidegger's idea of Being, that the essence of things would come forward within the fourfold,⁶ is itself a rational deduction that assumes the "I" knows "the Other" (the essence of things). This demonstrates that Heidegger still places the Other under "me."

In terms of time, Lévinas does admire Heidegger's disapproval of a traditional ontological understanding of "time," which renders it one of the (concrete) objects. The attempt of Western epistemology to grasp "time," initiated by Aristotle, is another instance of defining the essence and attributes of "time," reducing it to the domain of ontology. According to Aristotle, the attributes of time are: 1) the priority of future, 2) the irreversibility of time, and 3) its infinity (Chanter TDFLH, 27). However, although Lévinas applauded Heidegger's insight in overthrowing the traditional Aristotelian concept of time, specifically its attribute of "infinity," he also identifies a problem with Heidegger's notion of "Dasein," which for Lévinas is still confined within the discourse of the Same.

Though Heidegger does not believe "time" can be categorized in ontology, his argument primarily pivots on the length of human lives (death) and its focus in the world of the human. It is because human life has a limit that makes the "infinite of time" invalid. In other words, if

⁶ Heidegger influenced and inspired Lévinas. Heidegger believed humans do not exist alone in the world. Interrelationships between humanity and its environment cannot be reduced into a one-dimensional ideology, such as pragmatism. What Lévinas dislikes is that Heidegger still posits human in the center of other things. This can lead to violence from the self (human-centered perspective) toward the Other.

“time” is not there to be conceived, perceived and used by human (lives) then it does not exist. Time ends as human lives end. For Lévinas, this precedence of ontology over ethics informs the “long tradition of pride, heroism, domination and cruelty” (TTO, 103).

Lévinas’s penetrating insight concerning the way humans “know” the world reveals the problem of ontology: humans do not pay much attention to the relation between themselves and Others, but subjugate Others under their own power of knowing/knowledge. Humans determine the relationship between the Self and Others through the mode of ontology. This insight is revealed not only through Lévinas’s rejection of time (future) as an ontological entity as mentioned above, but also through his notion that ethics is the first philosophy.

For Lévinas, the relationship of Self and Other has been understood as a set of hierarchical tiers dominated by a human-centered perspective, one that asserts its hegemony only *within* the territory of human knowledge, or rationality (the operations of knowledge). Traditional ethics is situated within this rationality, but Lévinas has a different definition. He approaches ethics by proposing that humans break the fortress of rationality and reconsider the relationship of Self and Others. In other words, ethics should precede rationality.

This shift in ethics is best illustrated through identity politics within post-colonial discourses. Simone Drichel observes “that postcolonial studies as a field appears to be plagued by a guilty conscience—a persistent anxiety over its potential complicity with colonialism” and argues that “this guilty conscience reveals a largely overlooked ethical dimension in a field that derives its *raison d’être* from political, not ethical, concerns” (20). Ethics brought about by such political correctness and incorrectness is strategic and likely to stagnate.

Indeed, Lévinas is “useful” if we consider that identity politics reveals some evidence of exhausting itself. In an interview, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that she has been “deeply troubled by identity politics” (Yan 430) because people get to know other parts of the world

through a cartographic position instead of a face-to-face encounter. Her *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* also explores the disappearance of post-colonial studies and a new academic focus on globalization. Does this shift foretell a new framework of ethics and foresee the limits of identity politics?

Spivak's thoughts seem to mark a dilemma in contemporary identity politics, paralleling Lévinas's concerns. Emphasizing the importance of ethics and Self-Other relations, Lévinas asserts that identity alone does not account for human subjectivity. In uprooting identity politics, he destroys the traditional ethical framework established by other philosophical figures, which he believes brings about violence upon the Other. For Lévinas, ethics is the first philosophy. What then is the relationship between ethics and politics?

The Western philosophical tradition has emphasized "reason" and "rationality," viewing it as a construction of human subjectivity and the ultimate goal of humankind. Reality, and ontology as a whole then, is based upon reason and teleology, as the primary component of ethics. That is, traditional morality, or ethics, is contingent on the reality that teleology and reason construct. This placement of ethics within ontology is what Lévinas challenges. For him, traditional ethics is overly enmeshed in a political framework. Violence is practiced in the name of ethics, and for the order of a peaceful society. Thus, to obtain a new set of ethics, or a new first philosophy, it is necessary to examine traditional ethics and divorce it from ontology.

For Plato, ethics is enshrined within politics.⁷ Following him, Aristotle reinforces reason/logos as human teleology, under which everything is subjugated and justified.⁸ The

⁷ Plato pursues a harmonious cosmic order which he envisioned in *Republic*, that is, politics can be said to be realization of "the good," which is also the goal for individuals to pursue. Since morality and ethics must be contained in a political order led by leaders with reason, they must be enhanced and maintained within the fortress of logos. For Plato, politics and reason are tools that discipline individuals in order for them to carry out their moral supremacy. Structurally, it is a top-down effect, making interpersonal ethics one of the tiers that benefit from political good.

⁸ For Aristotle, all things/creatures exist to carry out their teleology. In the case of humans, reason is what

Hobbesian view of politics is reflected in this political context. Hobbes' proposal that everything should submit to those in power (i.e., humanity) grounds the Western political tradition that Lévinas later defies. In the eighteenth century, Kant asserts that reason cannot be justified without empiricism, further contextualizing ethics within this "reason-oriented" tradition. For him, ethics refers to "right" action that conforms to justifiable reasoning.

Later, the nineteenth century witnessed the prevalence of utilitarianism, which was entirely consequentialist.⁹ The good/bad or right/wrong judgment of an action depended on its fruit, instead of its motivation. Happiness is equivalent to pleasure, which is equivalent to the avoidance of pain. Therefore actions that bring about a pleasant result are considered good and ethical.

What links these ethical philosophies mentioned above is that ethics is considered a consequence of a defined subjectivity. This subjectivity can be applied on both a personal and collective (i.e., political) level. What constitutes "subjectivity," as illustrated above, is "reason" (i.e., logos). However, Lévinas's theory totally undermines such a reason-centered subjectivity. Instead, he claims that the finite subject is constructed as part of the infinite Other. His idea of ethics situates the subject as subjugated to the holy Other, held as a hostage. A subject is only complete in its subjectivity when it is in relationship with an Other.

Instead of a top-down influence from the collective (i.e., political) to the individual, Lévinas proposes an ethics with a rippling effect. He does not agree that a politically sanctioned rationality is the only way to contest another political totality. This would only lead to war,

distinguishes humans from animals, and it is the only tool that can lead to happiness (as the teleology of humankind). Ethics is a part of science that contributes to construction of a good human society. The primary aim of ethical education is therefore to help humans realize their maximum potential ability to reason, so as to further pull humans away from their animality.

⁹ "A (purely) consequentialist ethical theory is a general normative theory that bases the moral evaluation of acts, rules, institutions, etc. solely on the goodness of their consequences, where the standard of goodness employed is a standard of non-moral goodness." ("Consequentialist Ethical Theories.")

which is not a solution at all. Instead, he proposes a move away from an “an-archical, ethical relationship with the Other to the totalizing realm of politics with his phenomenology of the third person, the Third” (Simmons). As the ego is forced to respond to more than one “Other,” and has to decide which one to deal with first, the matter shifts from an ethical realm to a political one.

The basis of Lévinas’s theory renders problematic Western philosophy’s preference for the Greek idea that “human peace is awaited on the basis of the True” (BPW, 162). A peace formed on the basis of truth would force multiplicities to come to consensus with unities; foreigners would be assimilated into a certain consensual ideal. Carried to a political extreme, this conception would lead to an empire that teaches universalism (BPW, 163).

What Lévinas envisions is a face-to-face ethics that would eventually exert its influence from the individual to the political (collective) level. It is obvious then that Lévinas’s notion of ethics is different from conventional morality, in the sense that it is about the way humanity constructs its consciousness—via subjectivity. Self, or consciousness, is born as “the presence of the third party in the proximity of the one for the Other and, consequently. . . The foundation of consciousness is justice and not the reverse” (Lévinas BPW, 169). So long as individuals can envision a network reflecting “the wisdom of love,” then old political structures cannot stand. Instead, they will undergo a positive change.

Within his framework, Self-Other relationships apply to various contexts of politics, interpersonal relationships, and human-environment relations. The rejection of a Self-centered political rationality, inherent in the Western philosophical tradition,—which Lévinas condemns, is pertinent today, as we face human/environment problems (global warming, animal extinction), gender issues (women as the “Other” in Lévinas’s definition are creatures subjugated by men), and national subjectivities (should one country subjugate another country to ensure its own

happiness?). These issues require a new form of ethics in consideration of human sustainability.

After all, humanity does not exist alone.

Among Lévinas's ideas I have found these elements particularly helpful: the third, the face, time, the Other, feminine, etc. Though these notions all emanate from the Self-Other relationship, they are terms derived from different contexts. In the next section I will specify the dimension of each term that is particularly helpful and relevant to different chapters.

Definitions

1) Violence

For Lévinas, violence occurs when individuals are subsumed into the Same. When everyone submits to a universal idea, for instance, a perfect order of hierarchy is established. This can be seen clearly in the violence of the state (Levians *BPW*, 23). The terrible nature of the violence is especially revealed when force joins with reason and the rhetoric of its necessity. In other words, the self-consciousness that emanates from reason, that has long been deemed as the only authentic grounds for subjectivity, carries an essential violence.

Lévinas condemns the violent relationship the Self imposes on the Other, a relationship rooted in traditional epistemology, which then colors all other possible contexts. Lévinas states that “violence is to be found precisely outside of the world where Reason and Philosophy reign” (TI, 25). Hence, to seek truth, through reason and philosophy, is no way to expel violence but to ensure and enact it. Therefore, the presupposition that seeking “truth” is humanity's destiny—one that brings about peace, happiness, etc.—is brought under critique. In the process of reaching for the spectre of “truth,” what do we do to the Other?

2) Love

Lévinas's notion of Love can be understood in this passage in *Otherwise than Being*: “Consciousness is born as the presence of the third party in the proximity of the one for the

Other. . . the foundation of consciousness is justice and not the reverse. . . to the extravagant generosity of the for-the-Other is superimposed a reasonable order. . . of justice through knowledge, and philosophy here is a *measure* brought to the infinity of the being-for-the-Other of peace and proximity, and is like the wisdom of love” (TI, 169).

Traditionally, subjectivity is *a priori*, perceiving the world with reason. Spatially, subjectivity is like a spider that pre-exists its own web. The subjectivity/the spider’s world ends at the limit of its net. The net is a symbol of reason (a model of epistemology) that leads the spider to understand and make sense of “its world” (the net itself). Every line of knowledge, politics, and philosophy is composed with rationality and is interwoven to compose a net world. However, Lévinas proclaims that for humankind, the (epistemological) net comes before the spider is born. The spider/Self comes to realize its own subjectivity through understanding its relationship with the net, and the relationship between the net and the outside world. In other words, for Lévinas, consciousness, subjectivity or the constitution of “Self,” comes from the relation with the Other, instead of the other way around, as modern epistemology assumes. So the function of philosophy should lead us toward alternative possibilities of the Self-Other relationship and a striving for love, instead of the “love of wisdom” that embodies a desire for accumulation (of knowledge for instance). In a nutshell, it is most wise to explore love between Self and the Other.

The Field of American Drama

The relationship between individuals and their society, albeit played out in many different contexts: public vs. private, men vs. women, individuals vs. collectivity (such as politics, religion, nationality), is one of the main topics explored in contemporary American theatre. In *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, C.W.E. Bigsby points out: “The theater is the most public of arts, it offers the opportunity of acting out anxieties and fears which are born

in the conflict between private needs and public values” (1). This stance echoes the focus of *Public Issues, Private Tensions: Contemporary American Drama*, edited by Matthew C.

Roudane, which points out that individual issues can often be read as a metaphorical threat from a larger discourse/institution—for example, “rape” can be read as “personal and social terrorism, humiliation, hostility, and degradation” (12).

The dialogism between the collective and individuals derivatively brings about the issues of repressed selves and minority discourses. In *Creating the Self in the Contemporary American Theatre*, Robert J. Andreach indicates that the second half of 20th century witnesses relatively more diverse representations in U.S. culture. For instance, women’s theatres and other minority theatres (i.e., race) have thrived in this time, and the individual’s search for cultural location replaces the former search of the individual for its “soul” (47). This endeavor has been understood as the search for “identity.” And indeed, following the ‘60s, identity politics has taken on a dominant, orthodoxical position in theatre and cultural activity (and cultural studies), serving as a central frame of reference in assessing various societal and existential issues.

However, theatre studies evidences a turn after September 11, 2001. As Anthony Kubiak in *Agitated States* points out: “The attack was designed especially for us. Its scale, the choice of targets, the sheer spectacular impact of the images seemed . . . constructed with a distinctly American theatricality in mind . . . The images powerfully echoed the history of the American disaster and action film...” (2). The attack itself posed a “violent indictment of who we are, a people of the spectacle, blind to the theater of it all” (3) as “the Others . . . understood us in a way we do not yet understand ourselves” (2). Apparently if “who we are” is solely constructed by my own perception, without the involvement of the Other’s view, then that construction is at stake.

With this stance posited, this project will appropriate Lévinas's theory of Self and the Other in the examination of contemporary American drama. Each chapter focuses on one or more aspects of his ideas, with accompanying terminology, relative to the relationship between Self and Other. Among other things, this project looks at justice, the Third, politics, motherhood, responsibility and the face, as well as materiality, pain and suffering. In his condemnation of the belief that "*only* political rationality can answer political problems," Lévinas illustrates how the "order of the state rests upon the irreducible ethical responsibility of the face-to-face relation" (BPW, 160). He envisions a transformational shift from interpersonal relationships (the face-to-face encounter) to those on a larger scale (i.e., collective, national, etc).

The core of Lévinas's concern centers on "ethics," which he proposes to reconstruct in light of the politics/horror of the holocaust. In his outlook, the influence of politics trickles down to individuals. Like Heidegger, Lévinas also rejects this top-down influence (from politics to individual) and proposes a reverse—from being to Being (Heidegger) and face-to face encounter to Politics (Lévinas). He disagrees with Heidegger, whom he thinks still upholds a violence of Self toward the Other.

Outline of Chapters and Issues

1) Intimate Ethics and National Politics

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been hotly debated in the US, the dialogism between Self and Other, on an individual or national/collective level, invites a timely exploration of the relationship between ethics and politics. If ethics is put after politics, in the way the Western totalitarian state justifies the necessity of war, this, for Lévinas, is only a reduction of ethics to politics. In the introduction to Lévinas's short essay "Peace and Proximity" written in 1984, the editors indicate how Lévinas's ethical thinking can be well applied to politics:

“Lévinas begins his analysis with the statement of the domination of a peaceful order of society is constituted in opposition to the threat of the war of all against all” (BPW, 161)¹⁰.

Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* alludes strongly to the Cold War era and dramatizes how that a hostile mentality and conservative political discourses can threaten homosexuality and its related political consciousness. This first chapter thus examines Kushner’s work and explores how Kushner, like Lévinas, suggests a bottom-up model of (individual) ethical influence on politics in the anticipation of a new model of (prophetic) politics. The totalitarian politics of the play, touching upon numerous arenas, from gender issues to medical practices, give occasion to cite Lévinas’s fundamental concerns, as Kushner espouses outlooks in sympathy with Lévinas. Kushner received many awards for the play, such as Tony Awards for Best play in 1993 and 1994, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1993. *New York Times* theater critic Frank Rich called it “a searching and radical rethinking” of American political drama and “the most extravagant and moving demonstration imaginable” (“Angels in America by Tony Kushner”) of the artistic response to AIDS. Hence, I have chosen this play for its exploration of the dialogism of ethics and politics.

I will focus on the idea of Self and Other that has been prevalent since WWII in American political discourse. *Angels in America* strongly evokes the problematic dualism between “Self” and “Other” in its criticism of politics, the horror of an unknown plague (AIDS), the enemy (communist), and, above all, the exploration of how bodily politics relate to political operations.

2) Human Relations and the Face of the Other

This chapter will employ Lévinas’s idea of “face” to examine human/ environment / animal relationships in contemporary American drama. As current issues of global warming and the

¹⁰ *Basic Philosophical Writings* is edited by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. The editors offer introduction to each Lévinas’s different writings. However, there is no specification of the author of each introduction.

excessive emission of CO₂ loom large, the relationship between humans and the environment becomes ever more critical. Since the Enlightenment, scientific knowledge has labored to understand nature and keep it in check. Nature has thus taken a passive role, as an inexhaustible resource for human exploitation. However, ecological issues that the world faces today challenge/refute this model of understanding nature and require a further reconsideration of the old model.

One of the controversial aspects of Levinas's Self-Other theory is his ambiguous attitude toward animals. Do animals warrant the unconditional priority of the Other that Lévinas proclaims? Or are they, as traditional philosophy presupposes, the representation of "Human Other" as creatures without "reason"?

The entangled relationship between humans and animals can be seen from many aspects: animals as Symbols/Totems, animals as pets (replacing human accompaniment), animals as creatures for humans to imitate, and, last but not least, animals as food, etc. The conference of The Ecology and Culture Area of the Popular Culture/American Culture Association in April 2009 characterizes the human/animal connection in this way: "American culture has had a rather schizophrenic relationship with the natural world. The Puritans bequeathed the dark view of nature as a howling wilderness filled with beasts—including Native Americans—intent on menacing civilized humans. From Thoreau, on the other hand, comes the notion that nature or wildness is the tonic for the ills of civilization" (O'Shaughnessy).

In Lévinas's terms, the environment, i.e., nature, reveals a "face" beyond human knowledge and poses a dilemma that logos cannot easily conjure away. Therefore it is urgent to reconsider relationships between humanity, the environment, and all other creatures that share the environmental landscape we call nature. In this chapter, I will explore Edward Albee's *The Goat: Or Who is Sylvia?* (2000). Lévinas will prove helpful in both his notion of "face" and his idea

that “philosophy reminds us of what is passed over in the naivety of what passes for common sense” (Critchley 7).

As a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, Albee ruthlessly examines the modern condition in a variety of aspects. *The Goat* is a daring piece, interrogating human existence through the issues of adultery, bestiality, homosexuality, etc. Theresa J. May points out that “*The Goat* explodes species taboos by offending our sense of absolute difference, illuminates the role of human desire in the commodification of nature...” (“Beyond Bambi” 98). What May terms “absolute difference” is what Lévinas holds as the “face.” The commodification of nature itself also demonstrates the violence Self imposes onto the (nature) Other.

3) Human Relations and the Face of the Other

This chapter explores the notion of “race” and “ethnicity” in David Henry Hwang’s works *The Sound of Voice*, *The Bondage*, *Face Value* and *Yellow face*.¹¹ As a prominent Asian-American playwright, Hwang has been characterized as a mouthpiece (as he depicted himself in *Yellow face*) for voicing the relationship between East and West, and many of his plays feature the exploration of the concept of “race.”

Analyzing his many “race” plays, this chapter aims to contextualize Hwang’s notion of race in Western epistemology. (*The Sound of Voice* exemplifies an interaction between different epistemological models and is one of the Hwang plays that is not directly about race—though his treatment of epistemology bears upon racial imaging.) Lévinas’s early work *Time and the Other* will serve as the main theoretical source I will rely on in the analysis of traditional Western epistemology. In this work Lévinas demonstrates the difference between his notion of time and that of Heidegger. In *The Sound of Voice*, various historical views are reified in gender

¹¹ *Face Vale* has never been produced. Hwang incorporated material from this work into his next play, *The Yellow Face*.

differences. The man represents the Western, dominant, and progressive historical view, demonstrated in the linear viewpoint of time, while the woman serves as an alternative view—i.e., the Eastern, subjective, and regressive historical view demonstrated in the non-linear viewpoint of time. Lévinas's argument about the extension of traditional philosophy's boundary, dominating-subject-object relations, will be a great facilitator in understanding the epistemological model reflected in this play.

Using *The Sound of Voice* as a point of entry into Hwang's other "race plays," I then analyze how Hwang's critique of race issues from his epistemological reflection. This feature is especially evident in his recent work *Yellow Face*, which functions as a critique of practices of multiculturalism.

4) The Female and Desubjectification

This chapter will explore alternative understandings of womanhood, motherhood and parenthood through analysis of Paula Vogel's *And Baby Makes 7* and *Hot 'n' Throbbing*. Vogel is a prominent and prolific playwright, whose works feature a major concern with gender issues, such as alternative sexuality, alternative parenthood, etc. Though she often chooses to theatricalize difficult issues like sexual abuse and/or incest, "violence" remains a constant motif in her work. *Hot 'n' Throbbing* (1994), for instance, is a work that witnesses a man abusing his wife. It is through this issue that I bring her dramaturgical themes and Lévinas's ideas together.

One of the most illuminating ways to understand Lévinas's Self/Other relationship can be found in an investigation of motherhood—a state that illustrates the "other in the same" and suggests an inescapable responsibility toward the Other. The Levinasian model thus offers an insightful vantage point for analyzing Vogel's *And Baby Makes 7* (1986), a play in which Vogel depicts a non-traditional motherhood, one that interrogates traditional notions of the nursing figure.

Noting how female narratives operate with patriarchal discourse, this chapter first discusses *Hot 'n' Throbbing* as an example of her dramatic methodology (attempting to disrupt patriarchal discourse through parody and non-conventional narrative technique). After this analysis, I discuss her *And Baby Makes 7*, which demonstrates Vogel's effort in desubjectification and envisions the possibility of an alternative female subjectivity.

Theoretical Scope and Influences

This project relies heavily on Lévinas's theories. In my exploration of his notion of alterity I will involve his major texts, namely, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*. In the former work Lévinas advances his idea of alterity in his discussion of, among other things, justice, social relations, materiality and bodily enjoyment, and the irreducibility of face-to-face encounter. In the latter, he further analyzes the conception of Other in the domain of language.

I will also examine his early work, specifically *Time and the Other*, in which he elaborates on the relationship between time, death, the Other, and the feminine. His work following, *Otherwise than Being: God Who comes to the Idea* (1982) and the article "Diachrony and Representation," extends the spectrum of Other to the absolute alterity of God. Although I do not discuss theology in any of the chapters, these works will provide an important reference in the theoretical framework of this project.

In terms of my critique of Western rationality, Luc Brisson's *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* has proved helpful. In the exploration of myths and philosophies, Brisson argues that "to acknowledge the limits of reason does not lead to irrationalism" (3). This is a statement that accords with Lévinas's defiance of totalitarian politics, as both scholars deconstruct the binary of rationality and irrationality in mythology.

Some Lévinasian scholars I rely on are Alfonso Lingis, Richard Cohen (translator of *Time and the Other*), and Tina Chanter. As a matter of fact, I learned of Lévinas through Lingis,

whose article “Appetite” was my first exposure to Lévinasian theory. Lingis translated Lévinas’s major works *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Beyond Essence*. His own work has a fairly strong Lévinasian color. For instance, Alexander E. Hooke has examined the notion of “we” as a “collage” rather than a “collective” in Alfonso’s thinking. Richard Cohen is another noted Lévinas scholar in the US. His introduction to the translation of Lévinas’s *Time and the Other* is a clear and detailed chronology of Lévinas’s thinking.

I also have conducted research on scholars who deal with similar topics. Toumayan’s *Encountering the Other* provides some useful debate on “difference” from Heidegger through Lévinas to Blanchot. Kosky’s *Lévinas and the Philosophy of Religion* seeks an alternative notion/discourse of God/religion after Nietzsche and Heidegger’s denouncement. By tracing the genealogy of philosophy that heralds the death of God, Kosky tries to locate Lévinas in a philosophical tradition and hence examine his notion of ethics as the first philosophy. Through Lévinas’s notion that a subject is constructed through responsibility rather than consciousness, Kosky argues that this topic could be extended to religious behaviors, such as martyrdom and sacrifice.

Bergo’s *Lévinas Between Ethics and Politics* asks where ethics is located. Is it occupied within or beyond the transcendental position? That is, is ethics something concerning ontological status or does it render our daily life secondary? Addressing advanced students of philosophy, Bergo analyzes Lévinas’s notion of being-responsible-to-the-Other through different methodologies. Our responsibility to the Other as a family member (still in the “Self” realm) does not need explanation. However, responsibility to the Other as a stranger needs interpretation in order to launch this statement into the empirical realm. This is a shift away from phenomenology and toward hermeneutics, and Bergo’s task in the book is to analyze whether or not this really provides ground upon which we can understand why we need to subject the Other.

1) Intimate Ethics and National Politics

In the exploration of Kushner's political views and ideas of historical progression, I consulted many critics' works, such as Atsushi Fujita's "Queer Politics to Fabulous Politics in *Angels in America*: Pinklisting and Forgiving Roy Cohn," David Krasner's "Stonewall, 'Constant Historical Progress,' and *Angels in America*: The Neo-Hegelian Positivist Sense," David Savran's "How *Angels in America* Reconstructs the Nation," Oona Eisenstadt's "Anti-Utopianism Revisited," and so on. Such scholars help situate Kushner in current political and ethical conversations.

Daryl's "Cold War Science and the Body Politic: An Immuno/Virological Approach to *Angels in America*" also inspired my thinking. This essay examines the cultural, medical and political background stemming from the Cold War to the 1980s, thus highlighting the interconnectedness of interdisciplinary discourse. In my independent studies work carried out in the summer of 2007, I conducted a project on medicine and literature under the course of Health Communication. In the project, I wrote three papers examining the history of medicine, all of which I think fit into the Self-Other discourse: "Socialism and Inoculation in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma* and Its Preface," "Could Theatre be another Laboratory? Reflections on Theatre of Cruelty in Social Medical Context," and "In the Search of Self: the Self-Other Relationship in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*."

In this chapter I chiefly focus on Lévinas's concept of bodily sensation as the origin of ethics and how this insight brings about a different understanding of politics and the interplay of Self and institution.

2) Human Relations and the Face of the Other

The scholarly and intellectual aspects of this chapter primarily involve two organizing focal points: 1) the genealogy of Western philosophical views on the definition of human-ness

and the distinction between the human and non-human; and 2) contemporary reflection on the use of animals and how a rethinking of the animal-human relation may lead to a new ecological awareness.

In “Animalizing Performance, Becoming-Theatre: Inside Zooësis with The Animal Project at NYU,” Una Chaudhuri and Shonni Enelow describe the project they conducted that explored the overlap between theatre and animal studies. Jennifer Parker-Starbuck’s “Becoming-Animate: On the Performed Limits of Human” develops Donna Jeanne Haraway’s ideas of cyborg (*Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*) and explores the distinction and interrelationship between the triangulation of human, animal and cyborg (technology). Through such an exploration Parker-Starbuck foregrounds the ethical significance of modern performance. Since Lévinas believes technology can promote ethics, such recent scholarship enlivens discussion pertaining to the boundaries of the human, the animal, and the technological.

In this chapter, I will also include scholarship questioning whether Lévinas does/can include different species in his theory of unconditional love for the Other. Though Lévinas claims that a dog in the concentration camp was “the last Kantian in Nazi Germany,” in his essay “The Name of a dog, or Natural right,” he still uses animals mainly for symbolic meaning, within a human language order. Articles which address this issue include but are not limited to Barbara Jane Davy’s “An Other Face of Ethics in Lévinas,” and Theresa J. May’s “Beyond Bambi: Toward a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies.” This scholarship helps contextualize the analysis of this chapter, which primarily uses Lévinas’s notion of the Face to explore the relationship between the human and non-human worlds.

3) Cultural Differences and Epistemology

The source I found most useful in this chapter is Dorinne Kondo’s *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*, which focuses on Asian-American Theatre; her work

highlights performativity as a central component in understanding race and gender. This book is particularly related to my research in that it specifically centers on Hwang's work to illustrate her argument and approach.

I also found scholarship helpful that explores multiculturalism and identity politics, such as Rey Chow's *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading*, wherein she argues that multiculturalism risks charges of fascism in its essentializing nature. Other important sources include Josephine Lee's "*Tokens?: The NYC Asian American Experience on Stage*," and Ban Wang's *Reimagining Political Community: Diaspora, Nation-State, and the Struggle for Recognition*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* also proves useful in that she explores the problematic aspects of post-colonial studies and the rising academic focus on globalization.

In this chapter I employ Lévinas's notion of "time" in the discussion of traditional Western epistemology to illustrate an East/West divide. The Self-Other relationship embedded in such an epistemology informs his understanding of knowledge and ethics. This Self-Other relation has been highly important in formation of racial and ethnic identities and the understanding of otherness in a Western outlook.

4) The Female and Desubjectification

This chapter grounds itself in the history of the American feminist movement and its theatre. In the chapter's discussion of narrative, self and adulthood, Lisa Guenther's *The Gift of the Other: Lévinas and the Politics of Reproduction* provides much insight. The argument of the chapter rests heavily on key Lévinasian insights. My analysis of *Hot 'n' Throbbing* utilizes Lévinas's idea of "existence without existents" to explain Vogel's methodology of desubjectification. Lévinas's metaphorical usage of "motherhood" and his tension between the "virile ego" and the "effeminization of ethics" serve as important theoretical components for my

discussion of *And Baby Makes 7*. The scholarship of David Savran proves particularly helpful in situating Vogel's plays in the context of American theatre and in understanding the aims and effects of her unique theatrical methods.

Methodology

The method that I will employ to conduct this dissertation mainly involves bringing together an exploration of play texts with various theoretical insights offered by Lévinas. I will also contextualize these discussions within the 21st-century present, as a way of highlighting significant social, political, and ethical problems that will inform the future. Several of Lévinas's theoretical notions will be appropriated in order to explore the significance of the plays and their cultural contexts. In other words, instead of just giving a review or analysis of Lévinas's theoretical works, the project primarily focuses on how Lévinas is helpful in shedding light on emergent issues that contemporary playwrights have grappled with. This task will be accomplished through close readings of the plays, coupled with scholarly criticism on the plays, interviews with the playwrights, production and/or performance reviews, and so on. In respect to the philosophical component of the study, I will also bring in other philosophers and scholars who converse with Lévinas on common concepts, such as nationalism, time, (animal) ethics, etc.

The project can be seen as partly modeled on *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theater, Performance, and Philosophy*, edited by David Krasner and David Z. Saltz, which considers theater and philosophy as kindred disciplines. In short, the dissertation finds points of convergence between recent American drama and Lévinas's writings. The work highlights the continuing human conversation about being and belonging and the boundaries of humanity.

Contribution of the Project

Widely applied to various disciplines, Lévinas's ethical theories mark a turning point in the reconsideration of human relations in this era of globalization. We have witnessed how the

domination of science over human civilization has seemed to have brought neglect to the ethical relationship in modern society. Science fosters individualism, which then leads to the diminished value of community. Instead of seeking a way to balance science/individualism (the love for wisdom) with group value (the wisdom of love), the present day has seen ethics subjugated. However, given the condition of humanity today, one finds that many issues, such as international relationships, economic development and environment protection, gender issues, globalization and diaspora, etc., present great and complex problems that the pursuit of wisdom alone simply cannot solve.

Given this background, my project explores the philosophical aspect of contemporary theatre in the matters of ethics and politics, the female and desubjectification (new subjectivity), race/social groups, and the human and non-human. Theatre is not only a strong medium for voicing social, political and cultural issues, but also a unique cultural laboratory that examines and explores new possibilities of human relationships/ethics. As an effective vehicle to communicate and testify to human relationships in a time that witnesses rapid change (of people, capital, cultures), theatre plays a crucial role in exploring a new model of ethics. Such examination can help us to know “who we are,” can help us rethink our understanding of the relations between the human and non-human others, of this particular juncture in our history.

Chapter Two:

Intimate Ethics and National Politics

The nose is really a sexual organ. . . . Smelling. And tasting. First, the nose, then the tongue. . . They work as a team, see. The nose tells the body – the heart, the mind, the fingers, the cock--- what it wants, and the tongue explores, finding out what’s edible . . . (*Angels in America*, Part II: “Perestroika” 17)

In an era of globalization that witnesses mass migrations, intercultural encounters, and rapid flows of capital, issues about human rights and the status of individuals (inside and outside of nations) loom large, demanding new attention to the matters of ethics and law/justice, and the interplay between the two. As Plato correctly recognized that “one's interpretation of law will necessarily influence the interpretation of ethics, and vice-versa” (Herrera), a consideration of the relationship between ethics and law becomes even more intricate; such investigation begs the question as to which precedes, law or ethics. And how do appeals to either inform the treatment of individuals in a world where cultures and social boundaries are experiencing ever greater challenge?

Traditionally (specifically for Kant), law functions as an external constraint on behavior, while ethics is viewed as more of an internally- imposed set of constraints. While ideally laws should be the embodiments of ethics, functioning as an outside force to carry out ethical principles of humanity, many times laws function in opposition to ethics. For instance, laws may allow or even protect unethical behaviors yet punish morally good behaviors.

It is hardly deniably that “legal systems should ultimately be compatible with ethics,” as Hogan writes: “[this] is not to say that law should force everyone to adhere to some particular morality. . . [but law] should not contradict a core of fundamental moral principles” (1).

However, with some forms of moral understanding, such as individualism or utilitarianism, more

and more modern societies have abandoned the supposedly outdated ethical ballast and have given greater emphasis to law and its regulations. For Lévinas, the primary emphasis should be on the ethical, that is, the fundamental relationship of responsibility between the Self and Other. In his view, law and politics, which come from the introduction of the third, are always an imposition and challenge to the primary ethical relation, always a form of compromise.

What Lévinas urges then is caution. We should not downplay the role ethics plays in human interactions and should be wary of systems of jurisprudence/politics—in such systems, which are a necessary compromise, too much emphasis can be given to the practice and governance of power, to the application of law in a dispassionate and universal manner (which overlooks and diminishes the primary ethical relation of the Self-Other). If justice is a concept that involves fair treatment for all people (in a group) based on the core value shared within the group, such a system—though seemingly something to praise—may be abdicating its ethical obligation (which involves a face to face encounter with the particular). While Hogan points out that “[even] theorists who tend to separate legal and moral concerns do not commonly see them as intrinsically opposed or irreconcilable” (1), the opposition or compromise between law and ethics appears as a central concern for Lévinas, and a matter of crucial significance in an era of globalization.

Acclaimed as the most important contemporary American playwright, Tony Kushner first came to prominence during the early 1990s. His most praised work, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, won many accolades, including the Pulitzer Prize, the Tony Award, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best New Play, among others. Since then he has been embraced by the media, critics and academics, securing his position among America’s most iconic dramatists —Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, etc. (Fisher: TKNE, 1).

The tension between ethical relations and political judgments informs Kushner's plays, especially his acclaimed *Angels in America*. *Angels in America*¹² may be somewhat daunting for its audience, as the play confronts the viewer with images of feces and blood, with instances of betrayal, with numerous political rants, and with the strange arrival of the supposedly ethereal but incarnated angel. The play includes a broken rubber, a funeral, and a strong sense of disease and decay at the end of the twentieth century. The characters whirl about, amid different historical and political scenarios, experiencing great confusion and great desire. These figures embody a conflict between the political and the ethical, a conflict born by a deep hunger—for sex, security, satisfaction, contentment, stability, revolution, for answers of questions not yet posed. The play offers a dyspepsia of viewpoints, of liberalism, Mormonism, Reaganism, McCarthyism, etc. The character Roy in this play spews invectives when Joe raises ethical questions about politics; Roy characterizes politics as follows:

ROY. Un-ethical. Are you trying to embarrass me in front of my friend? . . .

This is...this is gastric juices churning, this is enzymes and acids,
this is intestinal is what it is, bowel movement and blood-red meat—
this stinks, this is *politics*, Joe, the game of being alive. And you
think you're...what? Above that? Above alive is what? Dead! In the
clouds! You're on earth, goddamnit! Plant a foot, stay a while.

(I: 1228)

Indeed, *politics* operates as the key term of the play. Through bodily suffering, coupled with rants about ideological politics, Kushner depicts an array of social and personal problems; the status quo experiences a hunger (expecting politics can solve everything), and the characters of

¹² *Angels in America* was “broadcast as an HBO-TV mini-series (premiering on December 7 and 14, 2003) over ten years after its Broadway production.” (Fujita 112; ed. James Fisher)

the play feel both dread and expectation. The play suggests that politics (from above) may prove insufficient, that person-to-person relations may offer the best hope for humanity, relations best described as the ethical. .

Kushner: A Political Playwright

The title of *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* demonstrates that the play concerns at least two central themes, as Steven F. Kruger points out: “it is an intervention in American politics that comes from a specified identity position and that depends somehow upon fantasy” (Qtd. in Geis 151). Regarding the identity issue, Kushner complicates the matter by bringing in a variety of identity attributes/labels--sexual identity, racial identity, and gender identity, and so on. In the play we also witness how religion can play an important role in defining a person’s identity. Kruger suggests such a complicated portrayal of “identity” indicates that “*Angels in America* does not raise an identity position like gayness as the sufficient basis for a political movement. We might indeed see the play as in part a response to criticism. . . of an identity politics that fails to recognize the multiple determinants of identity” (Qtd. in Geis 153).

Aiming to overthrow identity politics,¹³ that is, to investigate alliances not based exclusively on identity determinates, Kushner and the effect of his plays are often hard to categorize. Some label him a “gay dramatist,” while others, following literary critic Harold Bloom, claim him to be a “theological playwright.” Perhaps it is most suitable to name him a political dramatist, though to qualify the meaning of “politics.” Clearly Kushner seeks a new politics, one that highlights humanitarian concerns, which includes matters that pertain to gender identity, religion, and so on. Literary critic James Fisher describes him as “one for whom gay

¹³ Atshushi Fujita also argues that queer theory shatters the solidity of identity (Fisher TKNE: 124). David Savran notes: “*Angels* valorizes identity politics; it offers an anti-foundationalist critique of identity politics” (Bloom 16).

rights is a central personal and political concern, and one for whom religion and questions of faith and spirit are critically important” (UTK: 2). While the term “politics” can cover a wide swath, ranging from “racial and gender identities, to social oppression, to an actual discussion of a political ideology” (Miyagawa 180), Kushner’s works touch upon all of these elements, and his dramatic outlook is expansive. In this light, we see Kushner responding to one of the key critical issues of contemporary America, that is, how to forge a vision of inclusivity and tolerance, without appeal to traditional categories of belonging or ideological membership.

One finds a number of strands of thought and aesthetic postures in Kushner’s plays; on the one hand, his work exhibits outlooks that reflect back to other American dramatists, though his method also demonstrates less polemical elements. One of the core tensions in his plays concerns the relation between political program or policy (a politics from above) and the micro-politics, or the person-to-person relations that usher up a kind of politics from below.

Kushner’s works at times appear as a confluence of myriad voices, echoing the political playwrights of earlier times. He is often compared to Clifford Odets and Arthur Miller, “American dramatists with overtly liberal political sensibilities” (Fisher UTK: 4). Yet his writing also reflects the influence of European modernists, such as Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and above all, Bertolt Brecht, who inspired Kushner’s Marxist-inclined critiques (Fisher UTK: 4). In this regard, Kushner’s plays highlight the importance of history and the dialogism between present and past. The dilemmas of humanity, for Kushner, are situated in a material historical context, and the insights drawn from historical analysis illuminate human relations on the concrete, day-to-day level. As many critics have noted, “his broad knowledge of history enriches the questions at the heart of his drama” (Fisher UTK: 8), and in this regard, Kushner’s plays are historical examinations, placing political struggles and the turmoil in the lives of his characters in a particular historical context.

Like Miller, Kushner is politically progressive, proffering voices “raised in opposition, calling for resistance, offering critical scrutiny and lamentation” (Kushner, “Kushner on Miller”). However, characters in his plays appear to be more pessimistic than those in Miller’s. If Miller’s oppositional voices stem from characters’ disillusionment with a political mythology, such as Willy Lowman’s disenchantment with the American dream, Kushner’s characters suffer from a bleaker kind of cynicism. In *Angels* the characters know that political slogans and pontifications are lies, but they have no way to stop those lies. They are burdened more than Willy in the sense that political manipulations are conducted on a more deliberate and irresistible level.

However, like Miller, Kushner focuses on the influence of the “righteous” community. In Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, the supposed sinfulness of Salem women, and by extension that of John Proctor, triggers profound reactionary forces. The figures of religious and political authority seek to isolate and punish those perceived as deviant. In *Angels*, we also note a preoccupation with the deviance and sin, that is, *the sinfulness of bodies*—bodies inflicted with plague (AIDS) and sexual/racial identification.¹⁴ Without question Kushner follows in Miller’s footsteps, in that both draw attention to the coercive forces of a reactionary America. And both are aware that politics and policies on the macro-level have profound influence on individual lives.

While one can identify an affinity between Kushner and Miller, one that emphasizes broader social forces and the significance of ideology and governmental controls over expressions of difference, Kushner also demonstrates a kinship with an American dramatist not widely considered political, that is, Tennessee Williams, a writer more known for his lyrical realism than for any class critique or revolutionary posturing. Certainly Williams’ sympathy with outsiders and the marginalized seem present in Kushner’s plays. Fisher emphasizes the

¹⁴ Kushner decries the fact that the Reagan administration did not immediately react to the AIDS crisis. Similarly, Cohn refuses to admit himself as a homosexual infected with the HIV.

parallels between the two dramatists, writing: "...[among other writers,] the emotionalism, humor, and lyric language of Kushner's plays is most reminiscent of Williams, as are the phantasmagoric elements. . ." (UTK: 7). Kushner's likeness to Williams points to a care and concern for very specific, even eccentric characters, an attitude toward the figures in the plays that values a full, multidimensional inner life (as opposed to a style of characterization that utilizes broad strokes and allegorical aspects or functions). Moreover, both Williams and Kushner exhibit a fascination with the body, with sensual pleasure and bodily decay. Both note the importance and value of a specific, situated humanity, regarding individuals as more than political ciphers at the mercy of an overarching system of hegemonic dominance.

What one finds in Kushner's writing, therefore, is a dualistic outlook. His plays give indication of a broad frame, of grand historical frames and political narratives, of larger social forces and institutions ordering and coercing individual lives. Yet his plays also give emphasis to the specific and the sensual, the fleeting and the ephemeral. In some measure his plays operate both on the macro and the micro level. While much criticism on Kushner has privileged the broader aspect of his writing, my argument focuses on the micro experiences of his characters. For some Kushner is a rationalist, one who undertakes a dialectical critique of history, who thinks in terms of large-scale programmes. This aspect, for the purposes of this chapter, will be characterized as the "political." This outlook emphasizes systems and programs, with the view that change or progress operates systematically, that the dynamic that order daily lives and their possibilities work "from the top down."

This chapter on Kushner seeks to challenge those critics who highlight the rationalist, dialectical aspect of Kushner. Rather, I wish to give emphasis to the micro-engagements in Kushner's plays and his fascination with the body (and rudimentary encounter with the Other). In short, I wish to identify this micro-level with the "ethical"—as opposed to the institutional and

systematic features of the “political.” And consequently my analysis will give attention to the way in which social change and progress may proceed or “work its way up” from the particular and the bodily to the systematic and the conceptual.

This differentiation between ethics and politics is made explicit in the discourse surrounding jurisprudence. In its many metaphors and characterizations, the issues of law, legality, justice, and judgment invoke grand social narratives but also concern private and vulnerable ethical occasions, such as the limits of responsibility in relationships. One may consider that Kushner’s two plays each respectively sheds light on the political and the ethical. If *Part I, Millennium Approaches* reeks of ineffectual governance and decaying bodies (via disease), and demonstrates a dilemma in contemporary epistemology, how to understand the self in relation to the whole (and thereby gives emphasis to the ethical), *Part II—Perestroika* brings to positive light the discussion of how “theory” can propel human progression forward (and thereby function on the political level). That is to say, Kushner does not negate the necessity of a rationalist dialogism, but rather his work dramatizes the need for a more intimate interplay between rationality/politics and bodily pain/ethics. This outlook urges a reconciliation involving the term “justice,” between its more traditional meaning pertaining to the collective and ideological level, and the new possibilities that might come from an interpersonal ethics.

Claiming ethics as the first philosophy, French theorist Emmanuel Lévinas proposes an understanding of subjectivity in which the subject is generated from bodily sensibility and not rationality. This insight can help shed light on Kushner’s viewpoint in *Angels*; Lévinas’s thinking moreover can help explain a relation between the ethical and the political in which the particular and the private serve as the point of emanation for a subsequent, broader political construct. In this way, it is productive to bring Lévinas into conversation with Kushner. If contemporary playwrights such as Kushner have found that conventional terms and frames of understanding

(including identity politics) have reached a sort of exhaustion in imagining new relationships for the 21st century, then their dramaturgical investigations may be considered explorations of limits and impasses (limits similar to those Lévinas confronted in his philosophy). In this light, both the dramatist and the philosopher of ethics are working in common cause, attempting to articulate new understandings of relation and “being together,” in a world of difference and under the threat of domination.

One of the prevailing features of Lévinas’s philosophy involves his critique of philosophy itself, especially the tradition of philosophy that has privileged reason and rationality. Lévinas, by contrast, gives value to the bodily, to the particular, and to the intuitive. Lévinas stands as a point of opposition to the view of Heidegger, especially as the latter minimizes bodily presence and affect. Complaining that Heideggerean Dasein (that is, the totality of being) is never hungry (BPW, 134), Lévinas refutes this view and the handicapped and inferior status given to body/sensibility in traditional Western philosophy. In Heidegger’s Dasein it is the rational subject that renders all other beings tools that create and support its own existence; for Lévinas, the subject is a hungry subject whose needs issue from other beings and who need other beings to survive. By ignoring the bodily part, Dasein prioritizes rationality/consciousness and denies the idea that the Other initiates and contributes to an individual’s existence. Lévinas argues that such a perception traps the body in a historical view that only moves forward, and prioritizes a political dialogism that does not center on the human (but pivots on power).

Indeed the tradition of Western philosophy demonstrates a preeminence of politics over ethics, which can be seen from the prioritization of Plato’s “reason/logos” on into the Enlightenment. In order to materialize his Republic, Plato imagines a harmonious order where politics can realize “the good” (that is, determined by the system and its legislation). Morality and ethics, that is, the local and the specific, must be contained in a political order led by

reasoned leaders enhancing and maintaining the fortress of logos. For him, politics and reason are the tools that assist and discipline the individual in order for the individual to attain any kind of moral supremacy. Structurally, it is a top-down effect, making interpersonal ethics one of the tiers (lower) that benefit from the political good. Following Plato, Aristotle also asserts a teleology that presupposes rationality as the purpose of humanity. The chief aim of ethical education therefore is to help humanity realize its maximum ability to reason, so as to move humanity away from its animality.

During the seventeenth century, Hobbes gave further impetus to the privileging of the political, that is, to the overarching structure that coerces and controls. For Hobbes, ethics is considered in a political context. Hobbes's proposal, that all humanity—via contractual consent—should submit to those in power, grounds the Western political tradition. Continuing this trajectory, in the eighteenth century Kant contextualized ethics within a “reason-oriented” tradition. For him, ethics refers to “right” action that conforms to justifiable reasoning. Utilitarianism in the nineteenth century further links ethics to action in broad terms, to a consequentialist standard—therefore, actions that bring about a pleasant result are good/ethical actions.

What links these ethical philosophies mentioned above is a shared valuation of subjectivity as rationally-defined. This subjectivity can be projected on a personal level as well as on a collective (i.e., political) level. In such a view, specific choices and interpersonal encounters are regulated or evaluated according to a rationalist, meta-personal frame; it is the larger system that determines the “rightness” of any action. This outlook gives ultimate authority to the frame, which precedes any particular individual. It is against this tradition that Lévinas launches his ethical revolution, by proposing an ethics that has an originary—and consequently rippling--effect. He does not agree that rationality (sanctioned by politics) is the only way to contest or

debilitate a totalitarian regime. For Lévinas, such an endeavor would only lead to violence, which cannot be considered a solution.

By using Lévinas's insights, this chapter aims to expose the interconnectedness between ethics/body and politics, and to thereby explore Kushner's alternative version of ethics. Wary of the tension between ethics and politics, Kushner appeals for a new outlook that modifies and challenges the modern epistemology of rationality. Kushner seeks to enable love and its utterance of itself.¹⁵ He refutes the body as solely a site, as a cipher of power, activated and directed by simulating political apparitions. Instead of totally endorsing "the love of wisdom," Kushner affirms the "wisdom of love," that which identifies bodily politics as the starting point for any political and philosophical dialogism.

This chapter presents two sections. The first will survey Lévinas's ethical and political theory. It will explain the Lévinasian notion of how a subject is formed through bodily sensibility, which makes ethics not a virtue but the essence of subject-making. It will then move to a discussion of what justice and freedom mean when ethics is set as a priority, before anything else. What follows is a theoretical discussion addressing four points: 1) bodily sensibility and subjectivity; 2) proximity—the collective subjectivity of humanity; 3) *Angels in America* and Lévinasian politics (The Third); and 4) difficult freedom—the problems encountered when imagining ethics and politics through the role of the body. This component will eventually assert Lévinas's ultimate affirmation—that the subject has a difficult freedom, stemming from a total subjugation before the Other.

These second section of the chapter will use the aforementioned concepts to analyze *Angels* in some detail. While there are many and varied criticisms of *Angels*, this section will focus on

¹⁵ Fisher states: "Alfred Kazin writes of homosexuality that 'The love that dare not speak its name' (in the nineteenth century) cannot, in the twentieth, shut up' (Kazin 38), but the emergence of Williams, and those dramatists like Kushner following in his footsteps, prove there is much to say on a subject about which the stage was too long silent" (Fisher TKNE, 6).

Kushner's historical outlook and his commitment to a rationalist understanding of politics. I wish to argue that a richer understanding of Kushner's plays comes with an awareness of how his views on politics works in consort with his valuation of the private and the ethical. In this light, Kushner shares in Lévinas's Judaic heritage, as one who offers a prophetic voice arising from the ethical encounter between Self and Other.

Lévinas's Understanding of Ethics and Politics: From Body to Ethics to Politics

While it is generally assumed that Lévinas's notion of ethics as the first philosophy stems from his experience in WWII (as he himself spent time in Nazi prison camps), some argue that it was the Cold War that led him to this outlook and conclusion. His ideas about nuclear war indeed stand as a good example of how he saw the need for a modern dialogue on politics and ethics. As each super-power gave prioritization to the enemy's destruction during the Cold War era, a kind of world-order emerged that hinged on mutual threat. This era thus witnessed a politics forged by fear and paranoia, a competition over stockpiling weapons, and the constant threat of mutual genocide.

Nina Tannenwald, a professor of international studies, points out that most Americans believed that the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was legitimate and necessary, as the means to end WWII, and that the deployment of the weapon evinced a kind of "justice" (5). This outlook then led to the arms race and the stockpiling of weapons. The rationale operated in this manner: if the killing of my enemy now implies the possibility of my own destruction (i.e., nuclear war; the destruction of the whole world), then "my enemy" can no longer be defined simply as an Other different from me, to be overcome or defeated. Because the killing of my enemy may also endanger my own life, my existence is tied into that of the Other. The traditional black-and-white issue of warfare—with the only alternatives being my victory or my enemy's victory—became overshadowed by the development of a weapon of mass-

destruction, complicating the nature of warfare and requiring reconsideration of the Self-Other relationship.

It is under this circumstance (the appearance of a new and infinitely more destructive weaponry), where the ethical issue becomes exigent. Addressing this aspect of the Cold War, Professor J. Daryl Charles insists that the stockpiling of such weapons called for a reexamination of the “merits and moral substructure of armed conflict” (86-87).¹⁶ In this form of ethical-political conflict one can identify the generative core of Lévinas’s ethical theory, where the element of a fundamental ethical relationship precedes all social, cultural and political alliances or identifications. From here then, we can introduce Lévinasian notions of subjectivity, and how this subjectivity evokes a new humanity where justice is not simply a matter of relating to the Other; the Other is in fact the main reason I exist.

Bodily Sensibility and Subjectivity

Lévinas’s outlook demands that one reject much of what is understood as traditional philosophy. Lévinas believes that traditional Western philosophy has erred in two ways. First, it assumes that any manifestation of the “non-I” exists as an object solely for the Self’s interest. This assumption follows the claim that human consciousness is constructed through its own epistemological lens vis-à-vis the Other. Second, traditional philosophy has over-valued consciousness at the expense of the body. Lévinas defies this traditional priority of consciousness

¹⁶ In his “Between Pacifism and Crusade: Justice and Neighbor Love in the Just-War Tradition,” Daryl J. Charles gives many examples of armed conflict and mass-destruction: the exile and enslavement of Coptic Christians in Sudan by Islamic fundamentalists; Iraq's occupation of Kuwait and genocidal treatment of its own people, notably the Kurdish sector of its population; the starvation of civilians in Somalia; the slaughter of between half a million and a million people in Rwanda; genocide in Bosnia and Kosovo; the need for massive humanitarian efforts in Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Sudan, and Afghanistan; the production of chemical and biological weapons in Libya and Iraq; drug trafficking on several continents; the breathtaking rise of maturing, international terrorism; and the Talibanization of Afghanistan, Pakistan, portions of central and southeast Asia, as well as northern and western Africa.

over bodily sensibility, which has too often been considered “inferior, handicapped, or *primitive approximation* of representation” (my emphasis; Peperzak TTO, 162). This privileging of representation over bodily sensibility asserts that one’s sensations are conditioned within one’s conscious cognizance. If inconsistency occurs, sensation must bow to conscious cognizance. Only after distinguishing the Self from the Other, according to traditional philosophy, can we have “correct” feelings toward the “non-I.” For instance, if conscious animals are defined as machines that do not have feelings, as Descartes asserts, a spontaneous sympathy aroused in the sight of animal slaughter is a false feeling, a feeling one should not have.

Lévinas defies this notion of subjective formation; for him, the subject in fact stems from bodily sensation. He claims that the bodily needs to eat the Other precedes the distinctions between subjects and objects. So bodies are immersed within the environment/Other. The existent’s first encounter with Others is for its own nourishment: “Nourishment...is the transmutation of the Other into the same, which is in the essence of enjoyment” (TI, 111)—i.e., an energy that is Other becomes an essential construction of my strength, me. However, the pure sensational process, albeit enjoyable, conditions the un-free materiality of existents. Without the nourishment the Other offers to me, the concept of “Self” does not come to existence.

The experience/exploration/exploitation of the Other, Lévinas further points out, brings the Self enjoyment. Enjoyment is a term Lévinas gives to all bodily sensations. Lévinas explains how subjectivity follows bodily enjoyment by noting: “[One] does not only exist one’s pain or one’s joy; one exists from pains and joys. Enjoyment is precisely this way the act nourishes itself with its own activity” (TI, 111).¹⁷ In other words, need comes from dependence upon the Other.

¹⁷ Lévinas gives this example: “But if I eat my bread in order to labor and to live, I live from my labor and from my bread. Bread and labor do not, in the Pascalian sense, divert me from the bare fact of existence or occupy the emptiness of my time: enjoyment is the ultimate consciousness of all the contents that fill my life—it embraces them” (Lévinas TI, 111).

Need is the primary movement of the Same/Self (TI, 116),¹⁸ and hunger registers the material needs and capability of being satisfied (TI, 117). Lévinas argues that “it is the relations with the Other, inscribed in the body as its elevation, that makes possible the transformation of enjoyment into consciousness and labor” (TI, 117).

To sum up, Lévinas does not agree with the traditional notion that bodily sensation comes after epistemology. Having established a subjectivity based on sensibility instead of consciousness, Lévinas explains its ethical meanings: firstly, the Self encounters the Other before the completion of its own (rational) subjectivity. The Self’s encounter with the Other is enjoyable yet *passive*. As Lois Shawver points out: “...the egoism of enjoyment has the possibility of becoming ‘filled’ with sensations” (Shawver). Secondly, the Self-Other encounter is a sensational experience (with the Self being passive) and not a rational one. Sensations come to me from the outside in, while rationality is generated from the inside out, projecting onto objects that are other than the Self as a subject. Therefore the Self establishes a relationship (the ethical) with the Other before it constructs its own subjectivity, and before it can establish its own epistemological understanding of the environment. Hence by bringing bodily matters into subject formation Lévinas heralds the new philosophy that emphasizes ethics over knowledge.

Proximity—Collected Subjectivity of Humanity

If bodily sensation constitutes an individual subjectivity, what constitutes collective subjectivity, say, humanity? What connects all humans as a species? Imagine looking from an aircraft---what constitutes the overall characteristics of a city, say, “Baton-Rouge-ness” from a spatial or geographical perspective? The proximity of houses and farmlands that abut one

¹⁸ The term Rosalyn Diprose coins “something under my skin” may well address this notion to a more abstract level of Self-Other relationship: “. . . something has made me think it is time to think again. *Something has got under my skin*. Something has disturbed me, made me think. . .” (my emphasis; 121). In other words, my existence does not generate the ideas, but instead, the ideas themselves are counted as my subjectivity. It is this experience that sets off a movement that extends my world beyond the intimate and familiar.

another tell of the rural character of the city. The view reveals a dominant principle behind what is represented in the spatial arrangement.

What Lévinas would like to ask is, what force behind this rural scene ties the community together and makes up “Baton-Rouge-ness” or “humanity.” The term “proximity” is key. It suggests the ethical relationship among/between one another, and gives a clue to our understanding of humanity. For instance, what connects me and my neighbor, what I share with my neighbor, what connects my neighbor and his neighbor, and what my neighbor shares with his neighbor, and so on, forms an extension of the “humanity scene.” There is a force behind this cohering as each single unit goes toward making up a recognizable community. If my neighbor and I devour each other, the tie/order that connects us to the formation of this “humanity scene” breaks. Under this circumstance, there will be no extension of proximity “A-B-C-D-E---” but a phenomenon of “A eating B, or C eating A, hence C becomes A&B” sort of chaos. Hence there will be no recognizable “humanity.”

Lévinas believes the dominant principles that make up the “humanity scene” is “responsibility” and “justice.” In *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, he points out: “Proximity, difference which is non-indifference, is responsibility. It is a response without a question, the immediacy of peace that is incumbent on me” (139). This assertion characterizes a passive subjectivity founded on the level of sensation. This responsibility for the Other then further carries to the level of justice—one that is not enforced by governmental institutions but personal ethics (again operating on the micro rather than the macro level):

Its [proximity] absolute and proper meaning presupposes ‘humanity.’ One can even ask if *contiguity* itself would be comprehensible without proximity—approach, neighborhood, contact—and if the homogeneity of this space would be conceivable without the human signification of *justice* before all difference, and

thus without all the motivations of proximity of which *justice* is the term.”

(my emphasis; Levians OB, 81).

Hence “proximity” is responsibility and justice (OB, 81)— the common denominator of humanity.

Lévinasian Politics (The Third)

This justice, founded on responsibility envisioned by Lévinas, is different from justice defined traditionally, which is largely delimited by institutional enforcement (i.e., politics). This traditional enforcement is carried out by the concept of the Same, thus implying that justice comes after rational consciousness instead of existing as an *a priori* of humanity. A justice founded on this basis of the Same is only a shell, or a vehicle for the display of power. It is a contested arena for vying powers to further gain dominance and to deflect real human needs, thus evoking dangers that annihilate any understanding of ethics that centers on the value of responsibility and community.

It is perhaps helpful here to return to Kushner’s drama. Politics plays an important role in both *Angels* and Lévinas’s thinking. While Kushner is a political playwright, claiming “All theater is political...” (Blanchard),¹⁹ Lévinas, who proposes much on interpersonal relationships, nevertheless appears to be “useless” for political thinking,²⁰ that is, Lévinas advances no kind of political programme or specific theories of governance. One of the most intriguing and controversial elements of Lévinas’s ethical theories pertains to how politics should be modified

¹⁹ “If you don’t declare your politics, your politics are probably right-wing. I cannot be a playwright without having some temptation to let audiences know what I think when I read the newspaper in the morning. What I find is that the things that make you the most uncomfortable are the best things to write plays about” .

²⁰ “Gayatri Spivak—in her seminar at the School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell during the summer of 2004—made much the same point: Lévinas’s rejection of rhetoric, ethics, and politics, at least as we’ve understood them for two thousand years, and his development of a notion of ‘otherness’ seem to render his thought useless for political underlaboring in the world as we know it” (Bernard-Donals 63).

in the context of ethics. Instead of negating politics altogether, Lévinas rethinks and overhauls this traditional epistemology in a negative way: he realigns the order of politics and ethics. This negative operation makes him less a political thinker, but brings him into sympathy with Kushner, who situates (and criticizes) politics in the context of personal relationships, ethical responsibility and community. As the academic's attempts to explore the correlation between ethics and politics intensified in and around the time of Lévinas's death in 1995,²¹ some of Lévinas's political concepts came further into scholarly conversation; such insights and terminologies can be helpful in exploring *Angels in America*. Lévinas's concept of "The Third," for example, helps one understand the political problems of modern history and how politics can be envisioned as a consequent that stems from ethics.

For Lévinas, "The Third" becomes a kind of mediating device. In short, this construct pertains to the unresolvable conflict that may appear between Self and Other. The Third refers to a third party beyond me and my neighbor. The unilateral responsibility I have toward the Other deviates when the third party comes into play. The Third can be a face I saw as I saw the Other, or someone who I do not encounter as I meet the Other. It carries anonymity in character to some degree, and demands justice. The third thus demands some kind of mediation or intercession between the Self and Other; it functions as a secondary application, following the rudimentary and fundamental Self-Other interplay. It is an attempt to make infinite responsibility practical or material. While Lévinas envisions a justice based on ethics, there are theoretical and pragmatic problems. How can institutionalized justice (Law) judge ethics? In Lévinas's terms, how can the finitude measure infinity?

²¹ "In the years just before and immediately following Lévinas's death in 1995, ethicists, philosophers, and political scientists tried to make sense of the political essays in the context of Lévinas's philosophical thought" (Bernard-Donals 63).

Since the asymmetrical Self-Other relationship breaks (from infinity to finite), a political moment comes into being because the Self's infinite responsibility toward the Other becomes delimited. William Simmons characterizes The Third as "a never-ending oscillation between ethics and politics" (83). Many doubt Lévinasian theories can ever reconcile ethical-political dynamics and wonder about the ultimate goal of this theory.²² However, it should be remembered that the ethical is always given priority for Lévinas, that is, the demand for responsibility of the Self toward the Other is never exhausted or terminated. Politics follows as a tentative and contingent attempt to translate the ethical demand into practical, material relations and institutional connections.

For Lévinas, ethics is always singular. While my relation with the Other is an ethical issue, my relationship with The Third, because of its comparability, is an ontological issue. In other words, my relationship with The Third is not "infinite," which ethically speaking is incomparable, and can be measured by Law. In Lévinas's outlook, the ontological comparison (Law) makes justice practical and contingent, giving institutional organization to my ethical relationship with the Other.²³

²² Michael F. Bernard-Donals writes: "David Campbell, in 1993, noted the affinities between Lévinas's thought and that of Jacques Derrida and Simon Critchley, and spoke of the former's political thought as an attempt to 'reterritorialize the space [. . .] of responsibility, subjectivity, and ethics' [Qtd. in Campbell and Shapiro 32] in Israel/Palestine. Michael Shapiro, writing in 1997, saw Lévinas as reading time 'otherwise,' arguing that the Israeli's understanding of national time is radically different from the displaced Palestinian's, thereby working against what he calls one of 'Lévinas's more egregious blind spots,' namely his failure to understand the rights of Israel's dispossessed. Working from a theological perspective, Adam Newton and Marie Baird tie together the philosophical, political, and talmudic writing by focusing on Lévinas's notion of the 'other' and the 'neighbor,' noting that what binds the three genres together for Lévinas is the sense that the neighbor and the other are not the same but quite distinct national/familial engagements, and that Israeli—and world—politics are vexed by the distinction" (62).

²³ In "Here I am: Illuminating and Delimiting Responsibility" (*Lévinas, Law and Politics*), Desmond Manderson points out that "the legal understanding of our relationship to others was undergoing a radical though poorly explicated re-evaluation. . . . *Proximity* is the key word that connects Lévinas's explanation of the parameters of ethics to the High Court of Australia's explanation of the parameters of the duty of care. . . . proximity is an experience, emotional and bodily, and not an idea" (145-146). He then gives some real examples of the Court's emphasis on proximity that is close to Lévinas's ideas of infinite responsibility toward the Other.

To conclude, because Lévinas defines ethics other than ontologically, his understanding of the ethical relation does not conflict with Law/ institutionalized justice. As the idea of The Third breaks up Self's unilateral relationship to the Other, it also opens up space for judgment and for the reevaluation of responsibility and justice, as professor Bettina Bergo points out.²⁴ Modern politics, however, does not take the ethical aspect into account. It does not honor or begin with the primary ethical relation but rather works from the top down—political fiats thus determine and govern the micro ethical encounters of daily life. During the time of the Cold War, the imperative of containing or conquering the enemy functioned as The Third, the determining rationale and standard for evaluating specific ethical encounter. The Third shifted to an inhuman force (the nuclear war). As mentioned earlier, the Cold War followed a politics based on the competitive stockpiling of weapons, which complicated the Self-Other distinction and relationship. Here, The Third did not denote a person and hence did not open up a space for judgment where responsibility could be reevaluated. In *Les Imprevus de l'histoire*, Lévinas writes: “The third partner here is not the third man. It does not assume human form, they are forces without faces. Strange return of the natural powers...” (TI, 161). This inhuman Third, instead of opening up spaces for judgment, became a parameter for the evocation of threat and fear of both my enemy and myself. In other words, fear gradually arose from the (performance of) stockpiling of weapons rather than from any real battles-- what warfare meant before. Instead of acting as a means for the reevaluation of justice and responsibility, the (inhuman) Third then opened up a space for power manipulation, ideological politics, etc.

As the Cold War era faced an ethical challenge to maintain the delicate balance among international power relations, Lévinas's affirmation of ethics as the First Philosophy became

²⁴ “The image of the court is felicitous, for the tribunal weighs claims and can even ponder its own judgements. This space exists because of the Third party. Here questions of responsibility and justice may be evaluated” (Bergo 181).

very meaningful. In Lévinas's 1934 essay, "Reflection on Hitlerism," human struggle is marked by a struggle of biological forces of race; while in his 1960 *Esprit* article, "Principles and Faces," the human struggle is "overshadowed by the inhuman scale of the destructive forces released by nuclear energy" (Caygill 70). This shift marks Lévinas's re-conceptualization of politics and highlights the influential role of The Third in mediating the primary ethical relationship.

As Lévinas saw human history being propelled not by any human order but by a complex of inhuman forces, he became focused on the reduction of "human politics to an inhuman physics or cosmo-politics" (Caygill 71).²⁵ Human reason, wisdom and responsibility were abdicated, given over to an attempt to find a new balance of these implacable inhuman forces. In other words, politics was no longer based on humanity but instead shifted to the inhuman. This inhuman politics helps account for the emergence of a social order that centers on, among other things, ideologies and political correctness.

Lévinas then began to think about a politics that went beyond ontology, a politics that bordered on the prophetic. This prophetic aspect aimed to create "a new set of thematic links encompassing infinity, externality, justice and the other" (Caygill 77). Hoping to disrupt the old totality, this kind of politics envisioned a seed of the prophetic voice, of ethics and responsibility for the Other, to be planted prior to every social order.

Difficult Freedom

Because of the ethical responsibility one holds toward the Other, Lévinas's notion of freedom is different from the modern definition or understanding of the term. The modern idea of freedom, a historical concept concatenated by philosophers ranging from Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant, to Hegel, Marx, and Sartre, is defined as a state of being opposed to destiny and

²⁵ In the "Spirit of Geneva," Lévinas describes such a shift in history: "For the first time social problems and the struggles between humans do not reveal the ultimate meaning of the real. . . Reason no longer appears in political wisdom, but in the historically unconditioned truths announcing cosmic dangers. For politics is substituted a cosmo-politics that is a physics" (Qtd. in Caygill 71).

determinism. Peperzak describes this freedom as thematized by the epic of modernity (TTO, 96), a state of being characterized by “selfhood, choice, and rational self-regulation” (TTO, 97). Lévinas does not negate the value of a modern freedom that breaks the fetters of social and cultural slavery. However, what he contends is that freedom per se cannot be the origin of subjectivity; freedom can only come as a consequence, something that instead must follow responsibility. Lévinas writes: “...even if you are free, you are not the absolute beginning. You come after many things and many people. You are not just free; you are also bound to others beyond your freedom. You are responsible for all. Your liberty is also fraternity” (NTR, 85).

Within such a framework of ethics, prophetic politics is given prominence. In this outlook one notes a big and overflowing Other and a small Self—carried out by the concept of infinity. Clearly such an outlook gives no easy answers or applications. Again, Lévinas cannot be made to espouse any partisan position. His work is emphatically non-polemic or doctrinaire in any particular political sense. In his 1976 lecture, “The Ethical Relationship as a Departure from Ontology,” Lévinas asks “whether a theory of social institutions and the state can be developed from the ethical categories of ‘proximity’, ‘hostage’ and ‘substitution’ ...and ‘what difference is there between institutions arising from a limitation of violence and those arising from a limitation of responsibility?’” (Qtd in Caygill, 129). Lévinas gives no simple response. These are questions that lead to his framework of prophetic politics—a politics that does not set out with the aim of freedom nor security. The goal of the political is not freedom but ethical responsibility.

In summary, Lévinas’s ethical theory asserts a fundamental ethical state that stems from a subjectivity generated from bodily sensibility and a politics propelled by humanity (instead of inhuman force). A sensibility-oriented subjectivity admits the role the Other plays in the construction of its subjectivity, and endorses the roles justice and responsibility play in maintaining the continuity of humanity. Lévinas’s aspiration for a prophetic politics is shared by

Kushner and his own political inclination, which aims to illuminate, through employment of the Angel as a prophet, that which might lead humanity forward, to a better state of interpersonal and national relations. Depicting the gap between ideological politics and bodily suffering, *Angels in America* presents the dynamics of ethics and politics, as well as the dialogue between (political) ideologies and bodily suffering. In his play one sees the injury and oppression that may come from ideological assertions, from the commitment to an intractable sense of rule and law. Kushner's play gives attention to the fundamental experience of the bodily, and the intimate relations between particular selves groping to find meaningful and responsible relations. It is this tension between the particular and the transient (and its ethical dimension) and the broader structures of policy and governance (politics) that fuel the play and account for its unusual fascination and power.

Angels in America

COHN: "...Love; that's a trap, Responsibility; that's a trap too. . .whatever pulls on you, whatever needs from you, threatens you. Don't be afraid; people are so afraid; don't be afraid to live in the raw wind, naked, alone. . . Let nothing stand your way." (*Millennium*, 1226)

These words spoken by Roy Cohn in the play draw attention to the tension between the ethical and the political in Kushner's work. Many critics have paid attention to the broader political implications of the play, finding in Kushner a sort of grand-thinking prophet who employs a dialectical kind of reason in considering the broad forces of history and human advancement. However, Cohn's rejection of love and responsibility highlights the very power of these concepts, and in an ironic way points to the primacy of such in Kushner's play—love and responsibility operating as a point of ethical contrast to the broader political critique.

It is known that *Angels* is inspired by German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," a work that cited Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* to convey Benjamin's view on the movement of history:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Kushner in Worthen, 1212)

The critical positions taken on Kushner's view of historical movement, however, vary a great deal. In "How Angels in America Reconstructs the Nation," David Savran asserts that the work plays out a deep ambivalence "through a host of binary oppositions: heaven/hell, forgiveness/retribution, communitarianism/ individualism, spirit/ flesh . . . rationalism/ indeterminacy . . . progress, stasis" (Savran in Bloom 21). Nevertheless, Savran goes on to conclude that Kushner is different from Benjamin, and the ambivalence "...turns out to be not especially ambivalent after all" (Savran in Bloom 24), as

[m]eaning is produced, in part, because these oppositions are constructed as interlocking homologies, each an analogy for all the others. . . Binary oppositions are always hierarchical. . . *Angels* is carefully constructed so that communitarianism, rationalism, progress, and so forth, will be read as being preferable to their alternatives: individualism, indeterminacy, stasis, and so forth." (24)

In short, Savran wishes to see the play as an endorsement of rationalism and progress. Janelle Reinelt goes on to concur with Savran's view in her article, "Notes on Angels in America as American Epic Theater" (Bloom 66).

Other critics, however, challenge this outlook and take an alternate stance. In "Tony Kushner's Theses on the Philosophy of History," Charles McNulty notes that

Benjamin's vision... seems ultimately far less bleak than either Kushner's or Savran's wishful idealism. Bertolt Brecht's remark on 'Theses on the Philosophy of

History' seems peculiarly apt: "[I]n short the little treatise is clear and presents complex issues simply and it is frightening to think how few people there are who are prepared even to misunderstand such a piece. (McNulty in Bloom 54)

Progress for Benjamin, in short, was a "debased term primarily because it had become a dogmatic expectation" (McNulty in Bloom 54). Benilde Montgomery, in his "Angels in America as Medieval Mystery," is more sympathetic to McNulty's proposal. He reads *Angels in America* as a medieval cycle play and asserts that it may help "dispel Savran's suspicion that Kushner is as much the victim of Enlightenment categories as are his political enemies" (Montgomery in Bloom 123).

None of the above critical analyses, however, consider the role of body in the binary ambivalence that is ubiquitous throughout the play. While Montgomery does mention that *Angels* pivots on Prior Walter as the suffering body, just as Corpus Christi pivots on the suffering body of Christ, one finds that there is a positive and a negative role given to the body in Kushner's play.

What one sees in these characters is an emphasis on the rational, on self-justifications that minimize the particular (and the bodily). Both Cohn and Louis exercise their consciousness independent from bodies—Cohn's denial of his HIV infection, and Louis' justification of abandoning his HIV/AIDS-afflicted lover. They believe their freedom exists independently from the body. Therefore, in *Angels*, these two characters articulate an assertion of "progress" that is conceptual (political in the broad sense) and that is bolstered largely at the expense of the body (particularly by denying the cumbersome, negative aspect that can accompany bodily matters). Consciousness is here encumbered by body, which, seen as standing in the way of progress, takes on the qualities of an obstacle. Louis cannot deal with the flesh and death (*Millennium*, 1218). He abandons his grandma and Prior because he cannot "incorporate sickness into this sense of how things are supposed to go" (*Millennium*, 1217). Such is one view of progress in the

play, one that seeks to abstract, to affirm principles and maxims at the expense of the particular and the physical. Hence, as Savran asserts, *Angels* indeed cries out for change. However, for Kushner, the understanding of change is not necessarily one that derives from the Enlightenment tradition, which, after all, does not exclusively define the only means to progress.

In *Angels*, Kushner does not only depict the body negatively—conveyed through the attitudes of Cohn and Louis; he also affirms a positive expression of physical embodiment. Certainly such a positive outlook is conveyed by the deployment of Prior Walter, who gives voice to Kushner’s “prophetic politics.” While Cohn is determined to deny his infection, the disease, for Prior, functions as a catalyst of transformation and triggers his emergence as a kind of prophet. In a Lévinasian sense, the virus eats him, and his self passively reunites with the Other. Prior “exists from pains and joys” (TI, 111), and a new Prior spirals out of the imposition of his sickness. Furthermore, the fact that Prior is going blind not only brings new political meaning to the play but also coincides with a motif of vision and knowledge that operates in Lévinas’s works. In sum, such parallels and connections point to a profound sympathy between Lévinasian ethics and Kushner’s alternative political aspiration.

One key trope in Kushner’s play is blindness, a theme made concrete in the suffering and ordeal of Louis. The treatment of blindness in Kushner evinces ethical, and by extension, political implications. This element also helps one understand Kushner’s supposed rationalism (and commitment to any kind of historical dialectic) Louis’ blindness, in short, activates an ethical attitude and qualifies any notion of a grand political overhaul.

Lévinas points out that vision has traditionally been understood as the primordial means to distinguish the I/subject from the non-I/ object. Vision is associated with light, which functions as a marvel that make things appear. It “dominate[s] our contact with things” (Peperzak TTO,162), informing an epistemology that aims to grasp and comprehend the world.

In “Hard, Dry Eyes and Eyes That Weep: Vision and Ethics in Lévinas and Derrida,” Chloë Taylor reveals that Lévinas, along with Jacques Derrida, “frequently associates vision with an imposition of sameness on the other, and thus as violent in terms of the philosophy of differenc. . .” Hence, Taylor argues that “blindness becomes a trope for Lévinasian ethicality”, a mode or status that functions in opposition to rationality and apprehendable objects of knowledge.

Indeed, Lévinas’s concept of *there is* (“il y a” in French—his own characterization of Dasein) brings attention to the void/space contours that objects are set against. In Lévinasian thinking, the self must attempt to distinguish itself from the world that is—the fullness of the *there is*. The Self can only emerge in relation to the Other, but the Other exists beyond the reach of light or human comprehension. Its exteriority is opposed to the interiority of human knowledge that is constructed through vision—a fortress pivoting on human perception and epistemology. If “light” is seen as a means for humankind to understand and grasp control over the world, Lévinas is asking people to stop “shedding light on” the Other. The Other, that cannot be illuminated through light, will only be taken as the Self’s apparition. We should instead consider a new ethics and relationship with “the darkness.” In short, a truer kind of relation comes through blindness, one that avoids the imposition of authority and sameness that comes with a reliance on vision.

This is why Prior has to go blind.²⁶ We are not exactly sure whether Prior is losing his sight in the play or not, but certainly his going blind carries more metaphysical weight than literal meaning, especially considering the fact that losing sight is a common complication of the HIV

²⁶ Savran believes that *Angels in America* “deliberately evokes the long history of Western dramatic literature and positions itself as heir to the traditions of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Brecht, and others. Consider, for example, its use of the blindness/insight opposition and the way that Prior Walter is carefully constructed (like the blind Prelapsarianov) as a kind of Teiresias, ‘going blind, as prophets do.’” (Savran in Bloom 17).

infected.²⁷ When he declares: “maybe I am a prophet. Not just me, all of us who are dying now. Maybe we’ve caught the virus of prophecy. Be still. Toil no more...I believe I’ve seen the end of things. And having seen, I’m going blind, as prophets do. It makes a certain sense to me” (*Perestroika*, 55-56), Prior is referring to those afflicted with the HIV pandemic as prophets. It is as if they are saying: “Stop all the vain toiling to ‘see,’ but remain calm because a new era of darkness is coming. The darkness cannot be penetrated with vision/or knowledge, so stop using this old method (i.e., totalitarian politics) to approach the unknown Other/darkness.

Human beings need not strive to know, but should peacefully and passively wait for the unknown darkness. The darkness, however, is not characterized by catastrophe, despair, or any sort of doomsday, but a “painful progress” through which those past suffering souls will resurrect to repair the fractured ozone layer (the eco- crisis). Totalitarian politics not only fails to act for justice, but it threatens to damage nature/Other. Ranen Omer-Sherman, professor of English and Jewish Studies, points out, “[in] ancient Judaism, the prophet is not so much a ‘seer’ (understood as one who merely predicts the future) but rather an often marginalized outsider who critiques society, sometimes anticipating disastrous consequences if society does not abandon its pursuit of certain practices”. So Allen Frantzen observes, Prior “moves ahead, not in spite of AIDS but rather because of AIDS. The ‘virus of time’ has jolted him out of torpor and Self-pity and eventually transforms him into the play's strongest character” (Qtd. in Omer-Sherman). This observations suggests that those who suffer from bodily pain (going blind) and secret deaths (AIDS) will become the incarnation of the prophets, leading humans to “[long] for what we’ve left behind, and dreaming ahead” (*Perestroika*, 144). This walking backwards is a blind walk leading to Kushner’s ideal existence.

²⁷ Kestelyn and Cunningham, in “HIV/AIDS and blindness,” point out: “ocular complications are common, affecting 50% to 75% of all such patients at some point during the course of their illness” (208).

With the allusion to ancient Judaism, Lévinas and Kushner each point to an interesting confluence of suffering people and liberation that bring about a new ethics/justice. If Lévinas calls for an ethical relationship with the Other prior to the existence of the Self, Kushner goes further in order to extol this posture of “prior”—ethical meaning of community and responsibility *prior* to everything.²⁸ All in all, the danger of a predominance of politics/power/theories (___ism)/rationality in *Angels* argues in keeping with the Lévinasian notion of “vision”: the grasping desire to control the world. Both Kushner and Lévinas challenge the historical dialogism in Hegelian thinking that envisions the progress of history, but is susceptible to violence brought about by totalitarian politics (i.e., Facism). Whether Kushner appeals to a (backward) view of apocalyptic progression or, non-apocalyptic view altogether, the bringing together of politics and bodily sensation can function as a rooted focal point for the criticism of the (political) status quo. This outlook is shared by Lévinas, who holds that the domination of vision and touch is likely to eclipse the significance of ethical relations with exteriority.

It is through the depiction of negative aspects of the body that Kushner exposes his dissatisfaction with politics and how it has hijacked ethics. In such a political/historical view, love and responsibility are dismissed, and personal relationships are reduced to political tactics. The asymmetrical relation between politics and ethics is best illuminated in Kushner’s characterization of Roy Cohn. In *Perestroika*, Cohn laments the passing of a politics that is tough but simple: “My generation, we had *clarity*. Unafraid to look deep into the miasma at the heart of the world, what a pit. . .the immutable heart of what we are that bleeds through whatever we

²⁸ Omer-Sherman: “There is a gravity in our relation to that Face and this gravity Lévinas calls responsibility or obligation, a reality in which we are always already obligated to the Other, prior to any action (or failure of action) we might perform.”

might become. All else is vanity” (82). The simple expansion of a Self, however irrational and brutal it might be, is for Cohn a means to bring about a sense of security, the ultimate element of desire in the post-war and Cold war era.

Vile and reviled, Cohn embodies a Cold War political ideology enshrined in violence, which acts in the name of historical progress (Moyn 220), and whose top priority is to secure empowerment of the Self, to win the competition between it and the Other. This simplicity largely plays out in the play’s political dynamics as well as in Cohn’s personal character. It reinforces his power, thereby enhancing his brutality by eclipsing the complexities he fears may effeminate or weaken his commitment. Alluding to the actual historical figure, Roy M. Cohn, served as Senator Joseph McCarthy’s right-hand man., Kushner conflates 1950s McCarthyism and 1980s Reaganism in order to suggest a shared political orientation evident in the two historical eras. Both periods witness a threatening Other: McCarthyists’ witch hunts for communists and the Reagan Era stigmatization of the HIV epidemic. Under such political circumstances, the body and ethics are abdicated, if not abducted, from political significance.

This miscast ratio between politics and ethics further drives human volition away from bodily concerns. Known as the gay bashing attorney, the real historical figure Roy M. Cohn was actually a closeted gay. In *Millennium*, however, he refutes his doctor Henry’s conclusion that he is infected with HIV:

Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don't tell you that....Like all labels they tell you one thing and one thing only: where does an individual so identified fit in the food chain, in the pecking order? Not ideology, or sexual taste, but something much simpler: clout. Not who I fuck or who fucks me, but who will pick up the phone

when I call, who owes me favors. This is what a label refers to. Now to someone who does not understand this, homosexual is what I am because I have sex with men. But really this is wrong. Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council? Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. Does this sound like me, Henry? (*Millennium*, 1223)

In this statement, Cohn again desperately holds on to “something simple” for which his power-brokering ability is everything. Bodily matters—sexuality or diseases—are reduced or erased in the construction of identity. His emphasis on clout reflects his toil in the chiseling out his constructed identity from his bodily materiality. Hence, he is not a homosexual man, by his own definition, but a heterosexual man who fucks around with men. AIDS is what only “homosexuals” contract. What he has is liver cancer.

Cohn’s over-emphasis on his power-brokering ability is reminiscent of the “neo-Hegelian positivist sense,” termed by Louis when he tries to explain away his betrayal.²⁹ Through alluding to a totalitarian epistemology, Louis seeks to be unleashed from ethical conscience in his abandonment of Prior; he rationalizes his behavior through historical dialogism. Indeed both Cohn and Louis share the neo-Hegelian positivist sense, believing that volition decides human existence. They negate bodily matters in the name of either clout or freedom, registering a perspective of Western philosophy that has long informed the arena of the political. In “Constant Historical Progress, and *Angels in America*--The new-Hegelian Positivist sense,” David Krasner

²⁹ Louis confesses to the Rabbi why he had to leave his HIV-infected lover: “Because he has to. Maybe because this person’s sense of the world, that it will change for the better with struggle, maybe a person who has this neo-Hegelian positivist sense of constant historical progress towards happiness or perfection or something, who feels very powerful because he feels connected to these forces, moving uphill at all the time...maybe that person can’t, um, incorporate sickness into this sense of how things are supposed to go. Maybe vomit...and sores...and diseases...really frighten him...” (*Millennium* 1217).

examines Louis's phrase "neo-Hegelian positivist sense" to illuminate Louis' purpose in the play. His argument essentially centers on Louis, who largely shares with Cohn the demarcation between the "personal will to power" and bodies.³⁰ Krasner claims Louis "represents liberal Enlightenment [values]. . . [and] 'rationalizes' his betrayal, a rationalism owing much to Hegel's quintessential ideas of freedom" (TKNE 99). He rebels against the material-given (Prior's illness) and "progress towards spiritual contemplation—pure, abstract thought—*devoid of responsibility to the material, flesh and blood...*" (my emphasis; TKNE, 101).

Drawing on Kant and Hegel's notions of freedom, emphasizing volition and striving to "make rational actions coincide with a universal (moral) law" (Krasner in Fisher 101), as pointed out by Krasner, Kushner illustrates how rationalist maxims lead to a universality of moral codes, thus echoing Lévinas in affirming the problematic complicity between politics and philosophy. Indeed, the struggle of two competing epistemologies is ubiquitous in the play. On the one hand, characters like Cohn, Louis and Joe, who emphasize enlightenment liberalism and democracy, are those who avoid, abjure, or dismiss bodily matters. They are also those practically or ideologically involved in politics and the law. On the other hand, those who, like Prior, Belize and Harper, are trapped in disease, sexuality issues or emotional hunger, are those who appear repressed vis-à-vis the rational side of the binary oppositions (i.e., heaven/hell, forgiveness/retribution, communitarianism/ individualism, spirit/ flesh, progress/ stasis, etc.) to varying degrees. They are also people who explore alternative politics and historical views.

³⁰ Analysis and representation of Louis varies a great deal. Krasner points out that Mike Nichols' HBO production expunges the line and the paragraph, "reducing the betrayal to an unspecified act of selfishness." Martin Harries and Art Borreca compare Louis and Prior with secular liberalism and a seer. Others, like Borreca think Louis rationalizes his betrayal to establish himself as the "dialectical opposite to Prior as prophet", and further gets to the philosophical point that Krasner elaborates on: "[Louis is] a liberal rationalist who subscribes to the myth of a progressive, enlightened America but whose interpretation of these ideals is as misplaced as his abandonment of Prior is cowardly" (99).

Harper and Joe are good examples for illustrating these competing epistemologies. A protégé of Cohn, Joe inherits Cohn's progressive perspective. He simulates a morally good person but avoids talking about "bodily matters," which seriously afflict Harper. Harper, on the other hand, is depicted as a valium addict who worries about the ozone hole and dreams of traveling to Antarctica. Both Savran and Meisner consider Kushner's description of Harper a negative image of women. Savran points out: "Harper may be crucial to the plays' structure but she is still pathologized, like so many of her antecedents on the American stage. . . With her hallucinations and 'emotional problems', she functions as a scapegoat for Joe, the displacement of his sexual problems." (Savran 24-25). In her "Messing with the Idyllic: The Performance of Femininity in Kushner's *Angels in America*," Meisner also shares this view of Harper as supplemental character to Joe:

"Harper's appearance as a sexually thwarted and politically detached female figure constructs Joe's emergence, by contrast, as all the more reasonable, brave, and lively. The character of Harper could be simply a foil and yet she represents a certain troubling female corporeal presence: A "messy" reminder/remainder that problematizes the plays for audiences, critics, and even for the playwright himself" (178).

While both critics seem correct in their analysis of the characterization of Harper, attention needs to be drawn to the content of Harper's "hallucination"—mainly her worries over eco issues, her desire to travel, etc.

HARPER. I'm going to like this place. It's my own National Geographic Special! . . . I think I felt her kicking. Maybe I'll give birth to a baby covered with thick white fur, and that way she won't be cold. My breasts will be full of hot cocoa so she doesn't get chilly. And if it gets really cold, she'll have a pouch I can crawl into. Like a marsupial. We'll mend together. That's what we'll do; we'll mend. (*Millennium*, 1237)

Her desire plays out in a geographical dimension; her longing for sex and a baby (production), as well as her being a nurturing figure, all work together to abstract her into a motherly (earth) presence that is appropriated (scapegoated, in Savran's words) and ignored. In other words, she functions as the mythos that is reduced to the dimension of logos. This status in the play, however, need not carry negative connotations.

Savran also considers Harper's desire to have babies an aspect of the hysterical darkness of femininity authenticated by traditional patriarchal discourse. This reading coincides with Hegel's emphasis on volition, reinforcing the Self/Other binary and affirming a higher position for the Self. While Savran has some examples to support this view, his reading appears to be rather literal and limited. For example, Savran reasons that Harper's emotional turmoil, and subsequent desire to have babies, is hysterical (Savran in Bloom 25). That observation does not exhaust Harper's meaning or function.

What Harper says should not be dismissed and judged by the form in which it is presented (i.e., hallucination). The form is deemed derogative because of its content, which does not fit into the dominant discourse. It is seen as something distorted and disabled. It is indeed, as discussed in Savran's discussion of the binary pair, hierarchical, and Harper is indeed on the repressed side. However, Kushner does not champion Joe. Instead he has Harper leave Joe, crushing Joe's sanctimony and selfishness.³¹ In this sense, Harper too has a prophetic dimension.

Savran also reasons that Hannah, while depicted as a strong moral character, remains a caretaker, an attribute that belongs to women (Savran in Bloom 25). While it is true in practical reference, she is also depicted as mending the crisis experienced by Joe and Louis, who represent the binary of reason and Self-will. As Belize is also a caretaker, it is arbitrary to reduce Hannah's

³¹ Harper slaps Joe: "Does that hurt? Remember that." (*Perestroika*, 142) Such action thus indicates that Kushner wants the Self to treat the Other with respect, instead of as an object.

role to a traditional feminine category. Instead, both Belize and Hannah's gracious devotion to Others seems to carry out Kushner's ideas of ethics. It also echoes Harper's declaration: "We'll mend together. That's what we'll do; we'll mend" (*Millennium*, 1237). Harper here speaks to a problematic politics that has over-valued the ego and dominance.

If we take the issue further, using the lens of "mythos vs. logos" (this will be discussed in Chapter IV), the issues the couple are tackling respectively seem to dovetail into the binary embodied in gender contexts. Joe and Harper's conversation/ ideologies, and their bodies alike, never go together. The woman/mythos always appears in a ghastly presence made to appear as nonsense in the structure of logos.

JOE. Wait. For the good. Change for the good. America has rediscovered
itself. Its sacred position among nations. . . The truth restored. Law
restored. That's what President Reagan's done. Harper. Harper. He
says: "Truth exists and can be spoken proudly." . . . we become better.
More good. . .

HARPER. But it still seems that way. More now than before. They say the
ozone layer is. . . (*Millennium*, 1218)

From the perspective of progressive history, any worry about the ozone layer, especially in the context of Joe's possible promotion to the White House, appears impractical. On the other hand, a philosophy that tries, through whatever means necessary, to reject material (body) origin, which can be unproductive and lead to the discontinuation of the human species, is not unproblematic either. Harper's suffering from sexual hunger and her desire to have children, then, discloses relevant metaphorical meanings in this context. So it appears that characterizing Harper as a pathological figure actually plays out and fulfills the historical dialogism wherein the Other is violently subsumed into the realm of the Self. Her concern about a peaceful order, a healthy

eco system, and continuation of humanity is dismissed and derided as a hallucinatory mythos. Such characterization reinforces the negligence of bodily matters in traditional Western philosophy, and criticizes the enlightenment perspective, where violence is inherited, and threatens to hinder the production and continuation of humanity.

If *Millennium* portrays Cohn as the embodiment of political clout, *Perestroika* witnesses the recession of that totalitarian politics illuminated by his disease. In other words, through the characterization of Cohn, Kushner chronicles his diseased politics staging “a game of being alive” (1228), one that hijacks ethics and justice, the *a priori* that makes up humanity. While law concretizes the abstract tie of proximity, what Cohn does, in “breaking the law” and “playing the game of being alive,” is to tear apart the old definition of humanity by cutting the bonds that link humans in the shared category of humanity. That is, totalitarian politics, as Cohn writ large, promises and points to the undoing of humanity. After all, bodies are the bridges connecting the Self to the Other. Spatially, they create a proximity that makes humanity discernible. A negation of the body (i.e., body/ethics) then leads to the annihilation and dissolution of humanity. In light of this, Prior’s sexual encounter with the Angel symbolizes that an alternative politics—the prophetic historic movement—may be generated from a primarily bodily enjoyment.

This vision substantiates Lévinas’s notion that the meaning of Selfness stems from bodily enjoyment. It is a hunger that an existent has for the Other. This desire makes the existent eat the Other, and construct a Selfness of which Others are a part. This desire/hunger brings an unavoidable ethical relationship between Self and the Other (through materiality), and determines the Self as materially and essentially un-free.

While Savran also argues, “Without desire (for change, utopia, the Other), there could be no history” (Savran 23),³² his notion of desire presupposes a complete subjectivity. This view is tantamount to the traditional Western epistemology, focusing on the Self’s attempt to subjugate the Other, bringing it into its own fortress. Therefore, Savaran’s notion of desire is essentially different from Lévinas’s definition of that term. The two notions then represent two drastically different epistemologies and definitions of freedom. The freedom Louis rambles on about throughout the whole play is, according to Lévinas’s thinking, a freedom that can be pursued but is not the origin of human beings. Because the Self is constituted by many Others, its liberty lies in its inextricable tie to the communal. So only through the realization of fraternity can the existent identify Self-ness. Or, put it in another way, selfhood needs to be reconstructed through re-conceiving personal responsibility in terms of community (Others). Since Lévinas’s political ideal lies, to some degree, in anticipating the embedding of ethical DNA within subjectivity, this approach to redefining subjectivity and bringing transcendence to a communal level, is namely a new vision of politics. The practice of any broader political programme must acknowledge the ethical, relational imperative at its core.

Angels shares this Lévinasian view by envisioning a politics informed by ethics. Presenting Roy Cohn as an evil character drives this point home. As a powerful political figure, Cohn dismisses love and responsibility, even on his deathbed, pushing his protégé Joe to “live in the raw wind, naked, alone” (*Millennium*, 1226). Cohn prioritizes his political identity over his sexual identity in light of power. For him, politics are a game of survival, and ethics is an encumbrance, if not a hindrance, to winning that game.

³² The full quotation goes as: “...the time of ‘progress, migration, motion’ and ‘modernity’ is also, in Prior’s formulation, the time of ‘desire,’ because it is this last all-too-human characteristic that produces modernity. Without desire (for change, utopia, the Other), there could be no history” (Savran in Bloom 23).

Bodily matters also act as the locus of an imposed political force. In short, the power of politics trickles down into the personal, ethical realm, inscribing a totalitarian moral and code-system on bodies. In “Cold War Science and the Body Politic: An Immuno/Virological Approach to *Angels in America*,” Daryl Ogden explores this relationship between politics and body politics. He discovers that the early Cold War era also witnessed the formation of the medical sciences of immunology and virology, “sciences that would wield inordinate power during 1980s in the race to inscribe culturally dominant metaphors on AIDS and homosexual sexual practices” (243). Frank Fenner and Frank McFarlane Burnet defined immunology as a theory of how the body’s immunological apparatus distinguished “self” from “nonself” (245) in 1949³³; they also adopted “a rhetoric that nearly jumps off the page if read within the terms of anti-communist, anti-homosexual political discourses of the post-World War II era” (245)³⁴. The history of immunology and virology, as Ogden illustrates in medical discourses and sexuality, helped extend a Cold War consciousness to wider institutions of 1950s. One sees how the political shaped policy and how political ideology clamped down on “bodily matters.”

On the other hand, Kushner refutes having ethics dominated by political forces. In “Queer Politics to Fabulous: Politics in *Angels in America*: Pinklisting and Forgiving Roy Cohn,” Atsushi Fujita points out that Kushner risks misrepresenting his political message by depicting

³³ In 1949 Frank Fenner and Frank McFarlane Burnet published important *The Production of Antibodies*, which helped to lead immunology achieve a theoretical breakthrough commensurate with those already realized by virology.

³⁴ It is read as follows: 1. The basis of our account is the recognition that the same system of cells is concerned both in the disposal of effete body cells (without antibody response) and of foreign organic material (with antibody response). 2. In order to allow this differentiation of function expendable body cells carry "self-marker" components which allow "recognition" of their "self" character.

Cohn as evil, which may lead to the impression that Cohn, as a homosexual, is evilness itself.

Why is that Kushner shows not hate but instead forgives Cohn?³⁵ Fujita argues that Kushner

“...focuses on aspects of Cohn beyond the [homosexual] stereotypes and questions the homophobic discourses that strengthen those stereotypes. . . . Because of the prevailing view against homosexuality in society, Cohn’s homosexuality and political persona, morals, and actions are connected expediently, though these elements should be regarded as incidental.” (TKNE, 120)

By drastically distinguishing the political and the sexual (i.e., bodily) identity, Kushner adds sympathetic elements to Cohn’s characterization. Fujita reasons that “Roy Cohn’s sheet of the famous AIDS Quilt which commemorates AIDS victims, calls him not only a bully and a coward, but also a victim” (TKNE, 120). In other words, through separating Cohn the evil political figure from Cohn the repressed homosexual (bodily matters, a forgivable attribute), Kushner forgives Cohn.

This separation of political identity and bodily identity sheds light on Kushner’s vision of an ethics that does not pivot on politics—an ethic that brings people back to the elemental interaction between concrete bodies. Ethics is not about how a unified power deals with an abstract mass (indistinct faces), but how individuals are responsible for other persons. Through the lens of politics, Kushner may decry Cohn the attorney, but through the lens of bodily matters Kushner empathizes with him (being a repressed homosexual). It is the body that creates a bridge between the two human beings and constructs the ethical relationship. Through pardoning Cohn, Kushner demonstrates that ethics and morality should be freed from political imposition.

Louis’ journey from callous traitor to a penitent can be seen as the most explicit textual evidence of Kushner’s call for a kind of politics that issues from and honors the ethical. While Louis leaves Prior, invoking as justification the “neo-Hegelian positivist sense of constant

³⁵ Fujita’s answer to his interesting question: “Kushner, as a gay and as a Jew, should hate Roy who persecuted gay people and Jews in the McCarthy era” (TKNE, 118).

historical progress towards happiness or perfection” (*Millennium*, 1217), he does not really gain the freedom he seeks; being a heartbreaker brings no liberation. He suffers from self-pity, and wanders from strange body to strange body (having sex) in the hope of appeasing his sense of guilt. Later he confronts Joe with the famous phrase, “Have you no decency, sir? At long last? Have you no sense of decency?”³⁶, and needles him with the many juridical cases Cohn has tampered with. It is not until then that he becomes aware of how neo-Hegelian freedom can be masked or twisted by nasty political games, at the expense of justice. As the protégé of Cohn, Joe is the best product of this kind of distortion, and Louis then learns that love and responsibility proceed neo-Hegelian freedom.

The vision of a politics based on the prioritization of ethics (love and responsibility) is asserted by the end of the play. Those stronger/oppressive characters, Cohn, Louis, and Joe, repent or die out, and the world is then led by those who suffered but learned to care for the Other. At the end of the play, Prior, Louis, Belize and Hannah sit around the Bethesda Fountain talking about what role those “big ideas,” i.e., politics, theories or philosophy, should play in the making of the world.

LOUIS. It’s all too much to be encompassed by a single theory now.

BELIZE. The world is faster than the mind.

LOUIS. That’s what politics is. The world moving ahead. And only in
politics does the miraculous occur.

BELIZE. But that’s a theory.

HANNAH. You need an idea of the world to go out into the world.

³⁶ This famous statement is uttered in 1954 by Joseph Welch to Senator Joseph McCarthy, “who’d already spent years ruining careers and lives with less than sincere (and far less than accurate) accusations of anti-Americanism.” This statement “precipitated the downfall of a legendary bully” (Handler).

leaves Prior, their conversation reflects their different attitudes toward how one should measure and weigh responsibility.

PRIOR. Apartment too small for three? . . . not Louis and Prior and
Prior's disease?

LOUIS. Something like that. I won't be *judged* by you. This isn't a
crime, just—the inevitable consequence of people who run
out of—whose limitations...

PRIOR. Bang bang bang. The court will come to order.

LOUIS. I mean let's talk practicalities, schedules; I'll come over if
you want. . .

PRIOR. Has the jury reach the verdict?

LOUIS. I'm doing the best I can.

PRIOR. Pathetic. Who cares? (my emphasis; *Millennium*, 1231)

While Louis speaks about the relationship in terms of codified law and judgment, so-called practicality, Prior envisions an upcoming ethical “law,” the bond that ties humans together and makes humanity a recognizable term. Prior’s notion of ethical law becomes recognizable when Louis finds out that Joe, as Cohn’s acolyte, has been complicit with an epistemology that prosecutes “justice” itself.

In his article “Here I am: Illuminating and Delimiting Responsibility,” Desmond Manderson argues that Lévinas’s notion of proximity should be acknowledged and brought into jurisprudential practice because “we simply cannot characterize law as the application of ‘rules’” (Manderson 147). Kushner makes explicit that, while traditional epistemological discourse views morals legalistically, as codes to be asserted and followed, “*what it is to be responsible and what it is to judge*—are in fact integrally connected,” as Manderson puts it (my emphasis; 146).

The intricacies of what it means to be responsible and what it is to judge thus indicate a *difficult freedom*, one that, distinguished from Louis' previous understanding of that term, recognizes the entangled but inseparable relationship between Self and the Other.

LOUIS. I want to come back to you. . . I really failed you. But . . . this is
hard. Failing in love isn't the same as not loving. It doesn't let you
off the hook, it doesn't mean. . . you're free to not love. (*Perestroika*, 14)

This practice lies in the prioritization of ethics, which Lévinas terms as the First Philosophy, a relationship that initiates meanings not from sense but from sensibility. Hence at the end of *Perestroika*, Louis makes "visible scars" (cuts and bruises) for expiation. To cure this diseased epistemology that is associated with vision, the prophet (Prior) goes blind to adumbrate a new kind of progress.

PRIOR. . .I...my eyes. Aren't any better. (Squints even harder) AZT? . . .

LOUIS. These pills, they. . . they make you better.

PRIOR. They're poison, they make you anemic. This is my life, from now
on, Louis. I'm not getting "better". (*Perestroika*, 141)

This new kind of progress does not envision a future that is getting better and better; rather, it first seeks the mending and curing of the suffering souls and depleted environment/nature as they currently exist. Such a moment witnesses "the end of the Cold War," and, as Harper murmurs, reveals "a kind of painful progress": "Longing for what we've left behind, and dreaming ahead" (*Perestroika*, 144).

In conclusion, through the dialogism between bodily sensation and totalitarian politics, Kushner not only points out many social issues centering around identity politics but indicates a new (prophetic) politics that prioritizes the ethical relationship. Identity politics essentializes and highlights a person's racial/sexual/religious/gender attributes and reduces individual uniqueness

before a political dynamic and understanding. In such a structure, where the (essentialized) Self denies and persecutes the Other, and where ethics comes only after politics, “clout” becomes the only thing that matters. As a person with clout, Cohn can deny those attributes he considers as weak, such as his sexuality and his disease (at the expense of his sympathy toward and empathy with the Others). In short, the pursuit of clout, or pragmatic power, edges out his humanity. This influence of politics on a personal level also reflects wider societal developments, such as medical discourse, which empowers some and marginalizes Others. In sum, Prior’s blindness not only signals an overthrow of this traditional epistemology (that hinges on the Same) but also “envisions” a kind of liberation, a prophetic politics enrooted in the ethical relationship.

Chapter Three:

Human Relations and the Face of the Other in the Plays of Edward Albee

“Did your food have a face?” a poster from the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals asks (PETA poster). This provocative statement invites consideration of how a bloody carcass is transformed into a *delicacy*: how cows become *beef* and pigs *pork*. This line of thinking, given the industrialization of our food supply, further challenges one to reflect upon the way yards and barns are turned into “animal factories.” Natural habitats are replaced with a mechanized world: of assembly lines, conveyer belts, and fluorescent lights witnessing the birth and death of “poultry” (John Robbins 53). Likewise, we can ask, “Did your weapons have a face?” in the case of China’s panda diplomacy (Liu), and “Did your accessories have a face?” in regard to some fashion-conscious socialite’s collection of designer pets (“PETA slams Paris Hilton”). In all these cases, animals are reduced to “uses” of human needs, interests, and tastes, and whether they might suffer in these assigned roles is not taken into serious consideration.

French philosopher Jacques Derrida marvels at the capacity of the word “animal” to accommodate the myriad interests of human beings. This word suggests a human hubris that informs a logocentric epistemology. Derrida writes:

Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give [...] at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language or words, in short to the very things that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animals.

(Qtd. in Chaudhuri “(De)Facing the Animals,” 10)

The deployment of the animal for human ends reflects an assumed superiority on the part of the human. English and drama professor Una Chaudhuri reminds us of a surprising fact, that over ninety-eight percent of animals— including animals for food and pets alike—are bred for human

use. She further points out, rather poignantly, the self-deception experienced by the human self: “not only does it tell us that we eat animals much more than we do anything else with them; it should also help us to recognize that the self-identification as animal lovers that we perform every day in our homes (and on Sundays when we drag the kids around the zoo) is part of a paper-thin but rock-hard veneer on an animalculture of staggering violence and exploitation” (“(De)Facing the Animals” 10).

Beyond the inherent violence of our current regard for animals, our attitudes toward consumption and life-style point to broader global problems. A meat-orientated diet is contributing to eco crises, such as global crop shortages (Bradsher) and emissions of CO₂. In *Diet for a New America*, John Robbins points out the destructive implications of these practices: “It is hard to grasp how immensely wasteful is a meat-oriented diet-style. By cycling our grain through livestock, we end up with only 10% as many calories available to feed human mouths as would be available if we ate the grain directly. . . we lose over 90 percent of the protein we invest as feed in our livestock. . . lose 78 percent of our protein investment. . . lose 88 percent of the protein we feed pigs, and 83 percent of our protein investment in poultry” (351).³⁷

Such data highlights humankind’s often callous and illogical use of the natural environment. However, our current attitudes and practices reflect a long genealogy of subordinating nature to human demands. The imbalanced relationship between humans and the environment owes much of its formation to the transformative seventeenth century, the so-called “scientific revolution, or the more restricted Newtonian revolution, that took place in the hundred years or so between about 1650 and 1750” (Cook 327). This was a time when rational

³⁷ Robbins is “[the] only son of the founder of the Baskin-Robbins ice cream empire, John Robbins was groomed to follow in his father's footsteps, but chose to walk away from Baskin-Robbins and the immense wealth it represented to ‘...pursue the deeper American Dream...the dream of a society at peace with its conscience because it respects and lives in harmony with all life forms. A dream of a society that is truly healthy, practicing a wise and compassionate stewardship of a balanced ecosystem.’” (“About John Robbins”)

knowledge gained increased stature and importance, thanks to a social environment that developed a strict method for assembling, organizing, and interpreting natural phenomenon (beyond the reach of our senses).

Perhaps the most influential and emblematic figure of this milieu was Sir Francis Bacon, who ordered different forms of knowledge and advocated for a reliable scientific method. His life and work helped influence and shape this period, where a multi-dialogism of science (natural philosophy), technology (the mechanical arts), and commercial capitalism, along with religion, formed a potential new mode of knowledge in the service of humankind.³⁸ Bacon's impact and methods were highly important in articulating a relationship between the human and the natural environment, one which gave great value to "use" and "control." As Carolyn Merchant, professor of feminism and ecology, noted in this line of thinking, "A narrative of progress emerges in which humanity is able to recover that which was lost in the Fall from Eden, giving hope for the betterment of humanity through the control of nature" (149). She points out that Bacon's insistence on controlled experiments, witnessed, replicated and validated by a multitude of observers, helped legitimate scientific practice, releasing science, from its traditional confinement in the realm of the astrologer and the witch, to the more respected arena of the public sphere. This method in effect transformed science from "arcane secrets" to public knowledge.

Not only did this strict method of exploring "the secrets of nature" lay the foundation for modern science, Bacon's methods helped instantiate a new chapter in the human-nature

³⁸ In his *Valerius Terminus*, Bacon describes in the chapter "Of the Limit and End of Knowledge": "In the divine nature both religion and philosophy hath acknowledged goodness in perfection, science or providence comprehending all things, and absolute sovereignty or kingdom. In aspiring to the throne of power the angels transgressed and fell, in presuming to come within the oracle of knowledge man transgressed and fell; but in pursuit towards the similitude of God's goodness or love (which is one thing, for love is nothing else but goodness put in motion or applied) neither man or spirit ever hath transgressed, or shall transgress."

relationship, one in which the human clearly assumes a position of dominance over the natural world. This relationship, moreover, demonstrates highly gendered aspects, with nature cast in a submissive role. Bacon writes: “There is much ground for hoping that there are still laid up in *the womb of nature* many secrets of excellent use having no affinity or parallelism with anything that is now known . . . only by the method of which we are now treating they can be speedily and suddenly and simultaneously presented and anticipated” (my emphasis; 100). Merchant underscores the patriarchal feature of Bacon’s work and admonishes his outlook, that is, nature as gendered as female held secrets that could be extracted from her womb through “art and the hand of man” and that women held secrets that could be extracted through dissection of her womb and bosom. Such attitudes were part of an emerging scientific method—the method of the constrained, controlled experiment that Bacon’s rhetoric inspired and that has endured through his legacy (Merchant 147).

This statement is key to understanding the modern human-nature relationship. Here, absolute Otherness gestates within the womb of nature. Accordingly, the human is authorized to appropriate, test, and utilize the Other, bringing it into the rational/patriarchal order. The processes of knowledge give sanction to violence and utilitarian imperatives. The methods and outlooks of Bacon give strong endorsement to a consciousness of use and profit, one that clearly evidence a Western “love of wisdom.”

This love (of wisdom) not only features violence but also greed. In *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park write: “Bacon sometimes referred to natural history as a ‘warehouse,’ one that must be constantly replenished and drawn upon if natural philosophy were ever to fathom the secrets of nature” (224). This mindset, along with the ascendance of industrial-capitalism that characterized the twentieth century, has brought to the present moment an attitude of domination whereby nature has been totally pinned as an object of

subjugation and exploitation. The passivity of nature then begs an endless desire for more scientific findings, which are all oriented toward greater economic prosperity—more goods and more consumption. This imbalance between the status of the human and nature explains the situation Robbins points out in *Diet for a New America*, where we may be eating ourselves to a point of global crisis (and human extinction).

What one observes in this unbalanced relationship is an ethical breach, that is, former understandings of human and the environment offered a more integrated view of human interaction with the environment; such a view, and the ethical relation implied therein has been broken. When one looks at the roots of key terms, and the relationships signified, one sees an emphasis on cohesion and care. It is to be reminded that “[the] words ‘economics’ and ‘ecology’ are both rooted in the Greek word ‘oikos’ which means home. Ecology literally means understanding home and economics means taking care of, or managing home” (“Lesson 1”). In modern times, however, the Western outlook has diminished regard for care and sustainability; economy activities assume primary importance and view any connection toward the environment through the lens of profitability.

While there were preservationists in the early twentieth century who argued on behalf of natural spaces, for their value not as sites of raw material for economic development but as sites for edification, valued for their aesthetic resources,³⁹ it was not until the 1960s when the environmental attitude shifted; many at that time became aware that the daily life of consumerist culture brought considerable threat to the health of the environment. In 1962, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, which many historians consider the break-through text of the modern American environmental movement. Since then, the environmental movement has gained increased stature and influence, focusing on issues of pollution and environmental degradation.

³⁹ See Aldo Leopole’s “Conversation Esthetic”.

The movement today has drawn attention to pressing worldwide problems, such as ozone depletion, global warming, and so on.

In addition to these broader concerns, environmental groups have successfully exercised their power and pressured governments to take measures regarding the ethical treatment of animals and the protection of natural habitats. Such victories have been hard-won. In the U.S. in particular, enforcing such regulations proves a difficult task. Daniel Geary explains how new legislation has “overburdened the agency [Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)] with responsibilities. The enforcement process required the gathering of various types of information—scientific, economic, engineering, and political—and the agency needed to contend with vigorous adversarial efforts from industry and environmental organizations.”⁴⁰ No doubt the status of the environment (and the value of animals) remains a contentious issue, with varying interest groups competing for advantage. However, definite steps have been secured for the protection of natural environments, and a new consciousness has emerged regarding the impact that human activity and industry can have on global health.

An investigation into matters pertaining to the human responsibility for planetary health invites the introduction of Lévinas and his work, as Lévinas’s understanding of ethical relations sheds important light on the power relations implicit in conventional attitudes towards nature and its appropriation. While environmental organizations and some governmental enforcement have helped institute actions targeting ecological balance, it may be that they are addressing the symptom rather than the cause, that is, they only seek to alleviate the “effects” brought about by a Western anthropocentric epistemology. The current state of the planet’s environmental health demands new actions and new thinking. The avidity of consumerism, of a thorough commitment

⁴⁰ See Daniel Geary and Bernard D. Goldstein’s “Environmental Movement” and James W. Sheppard’s review of “Environmentalism: A Global History.”

to economic prosperity, has undermined the “oikos,” creating a breach between practice and home, between economy and natural resources. This situation and the depletion it has wrought begs attention and new strategies. I would argue that ethical seeds need to be planted, that they should take deep root in and change our dominant epistemology. A new ethical regard could change the way human beings treat non-humans, the way our daily choices impact the natural world. We might come to the realization that humanity cannot survive alone without other species; we might cultivate a respect for nature and bow before it, finding that it endows/nurtures our lives.

In bringing in Lévinas to this discussion on the Self and nature, this analysis underscores the importance of his challenge to traditional philosophic viewpoints and his particular understanding of the Self and its interior. In Lévinas’s terms, traditional epistemology fosters an “interior economy” that registers a dominant principle of bending Others toward the Self. This notion of “interiority,” according to Lévinas, determines and characterizes the Self’s (human) territory, which results from the subjugation of “exterior reality”—the non-human world. The Self *thematizes* the non-human world under its epistemology, i.e., rationality and consciousness, subsuming the Other into the Same by totalizing multivalent meanings into a unified explanation. The Self believes this that monopoly brings security and happiness, because every Self has its own place secured within its epistemological fortress. In other words, the Self reduces infinite possibility (of what the Self does not know) into finite knowledge, through totalization. Interiority is tantamount to ontology, affirming a nature of being, existence and reality. For instance, the ontological existence of cows and pigs is determined by reference to beef and pork (animal ontology dictated by human use/need). Lévinas, however, points out this dominant principle as a violent one, that bends and subjugates the Others for the convenience of the Self.

However, the boundary between interiority and exteriority is never as water-tight as the Self (human) wishfully believes. There are always moments when the Self loses its rational grasp on reality, when beholding the absolute otherness of the non-human. The *Face*, Lévinas points out, functions as a key element in this disruption, breaking the ontological façade. The face resists thematization of the dominant Self, and registers a moment of blankness (when one spots a person's face but cannot yet identify it). It is the moment before when one can judge whether it is a good look or friendly face, before recall of its resemblance, and before one decides how to respond. Detailed introduction of the Face will be discussed in the next section.

The Other is infinity shown before the finitude of the Self/ consciousness. The Face appears when humans are powerless and ignorant before environmental crises, such as in instances of DPP pollution or global warming. In losing the power to categorize natural phenomena according to Bacon's scientific method, thus failing to thematize non-humans via the unifying effort of exposing nature's secrets, humans thus lose their rational grasp on reality; they are subsequently daunted, doubtful about themselves and their place in the world. In essence, when the normal pattern is broken or disrupted, a crisis of belief or grounding ensues. A comfort in the way things are is replaced by an anxiety of the unknown. Such an epistemological crisis is depicted in Edward Albee's play: *The Goat: or Who is Sylvia?* (2000).

This chapter will primarily explore the meaning and impact of Albee's play by bring this work into conversation with Lévinas's notion of Face. In sum, this analysis will explore how Albee's characters experience disruption in their normal order and are forced to face a realignment of relations. This play is about a goat, but the playwright's treatment of the goat and the human realm invite broader questioning—how does the human exist in an order bigger than itself? In his own comments on the play, Albee points out:

You may . . . have received the misleading information that the play is about bestiality—more con than pro. Well, bestiality is discussed during the play (as is flower arranging) but it is a generative matter rather than the ‘subject.’ The play is about love, and loss, the limits of our tolerance and who, indeed, we really are. . . I ask of an audience. . . imagine themselves as being in the predicament the play examines and coming up with useful, if not necessarily comfortable responses” (SMM, 262)

In this quote Albee underscores elements and concerns that very much resonate with Lévinas’s ethical theory, that is, who we really are depends much on “love, loss and the *limits* of our tolerance” (SMM 262). The word “limit” here is crucial to understanding both the philosopher and the playwright. Human beings are limited in their ability to know; Bacon’s scientific methods proved helpful in organizing and interpreting phenomena, translated data into comprehensible knowledge. Likewise, human beings are limited in tolerance; there exists a norm of behavior constituted for the consensus of humanity. This idea of “limit” is what Lévinas calls “interiority.” Following Bacon’s proposal to transform the secrets of nature into human knowledge, we categorize what we know into the interiority, our comfort zone. What then allows humanity to comprehend, create knowledge, and thus enlarge its interior territory? The answer is exteriority, the non-human, nature, or God, in Descartes’ terms. In short, the finitude of the Self depends on the infinite Other. The Other is infinite because the finite Self cannot comprehend the Other’s absolute alterity. The Self is finite as opposed to the Other’s infinity. It is thus through this dialogism between the Self’s finitude and the Other’s infinity that we come to know who we are.

Central to this discussion is the position of the Other and its status of elevation and alterity. Lévinas’s ultimate elevation of the Other comes from Descartes’ notion of the cogito in his third *Meditation*, in which he begins to ponder whether God is only a subjective idea or an objective presence. Doubtful of the Medieval ideology of an omnipotent God and seeking the possibility of human subjectivity, Descartes attempts to distinguish ideas generated by the human

and those imparted to human consciousness by God. Descartes describes the irreducible Other as “an infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful substance, by which I myself, and all the other things that are were created and produced” (Qtd. in TTO, 57). The process of distinguishing human “authorship” from pre-human being brings Descartes to the idea of the irreducible Other, in that he relocates himself within the infinite Other (God)—it is this basis which Lévinas would later elaborate and appropriate for his prioritization of the Other over the Self. While Descartes does not explain away the divine influences on an independent human subjectivity, he severs the human from the divine (while God affirms humanity’s ability and rationality).

While Descartes enshrines human subjectivity in the cogito, Lévinas affirms and focuses on external reality, termed the Other infinity (God). This shift of focus from the cogito to the Other not only downplays human egoism, in order to accentuate how an ethical relationship with the Other is essential to the making of human subjectivity, but breaks the binary opposition rooted in epistemology. That is, infinity is not the negation of finitude, as it is irreducible and cannot be categorized/conceptualized/ comprehended through any epistemological/consciousness means. Because finitude/humanity is encompassed within the larger reality of infinity, it cannot conceptualize the Other/God’s infinity. So, just as God is not “non-human,” the Other can neither be categorized as “non-Self.” The relationship between God and humanity exactly parallels that of the Other and the Self.

On pondering what is positive about this “exterior reality”/ Other, Lévinas further departs from Descartes and raises questions about being and knowledge. The search of traditional Western philosophy, for conformity between being and knowledge, ontology and epistemology, as well as reality and consciousness, as Benso notes, demonstrates the process of Self-construction and a violent Self-Other relationship, as Bacon’s rhetoric discloses. While searching

the world for knowledge is good, equating it with being is not unproblematic. This procedure implies an over-dependence on rationality, consciousness, and a hubris mindset that risks exclusion, denigration and rejection of experiences that cannot be measured through rational means. In addition, prioritizing the search for knowledge through dissection of “the womb of nature” and appropriating what’s inside the womb will only diminish the significance of the ethical relation between Self and the Other. This movement risks reducing the Other, making it to exist solely under the Self’s epistemological lens.

This tension between being and knowledge informs the philosophical backdrop for *The Goat*. Having Martin encounter absolute Otherness in a socially unacceptable form, Albee throws a wrench into our conception of normality. The tragedy in Martin’s family challenges the concept that only normalcy will bring about happiness, a presumption that espouses an Aristotelian teleology,⁴¹ claiming that happiness only derives from the exercise of rationality (in other words, people only feel happy when they depend on common sense, and lead a normal life). Ascending to the crest (of career and social status), Martin embodies fully this fundamental outlook and epistemology. He however is awed by the power of infinity. The Face (i.e., absolute Otherness) is irresistible, and presses Martin to the border, bringing him to face the limits of his Self-ness.

In the play, Sylvia’s face serves as a Lévinasian Face, effecting a destabilization of the Self. This element brings us to the confluence of Albee and Lévinas and the fundamental questions: how do humans see and exploit non-human Others? How are non-human objects (as opposed to subjects) de-faced, cut off, or deformed to become a “being” subsumed into a Selfness, a Self that uses common sense and normalcy to justify its own existence? In what

⁴¹ Aristotle believes the telos of humanity is to exercise its reason. Humanity will then achieve happiness once it fulfills this teleology.

moments do the “Faces” of beings emerge and destabilize selfness? Both Albee and Lévinas point out a new understanding of the Self and the Other, the limits of the rational Self per se, and the constraints of traditional epistemology (rationality). Their views are thus enlightening when addressing the impending eco issues of today, such as that of meat-oriented diets and the shortage of crops that ensue. This visioning reveals the hero (humanity) as trapped, awaiting a new epistemological lens whereby the hero might obtain a new knowledge of love. In sum, the fundamental issue is one of relations and responsibility--where do we locate ethics in a world the human and the non-human both inhabit?

If Albee’s work suggests a question regarding the way we treat the Other, I argue, Lévinas’s ethical theory can help fashion an answer. *The Goat* is a very provocative drama, pointing out how people gripped by rationality experience a disturbance in their reality when the Face appears. That the play ends with the killing of the Other highlights an insistence on rationality, and how this rationality can be employed as justification for Self’s violence toward the Other (in order to affirm its Selfness/humanity). In other words, only with the endorsement of violence can rationality or normalcy assert its power. The absurd humor of seeing Stevie displaying the blood of the goat at the play’s end exposes the problems of Self/rationality. Albee thus does a commendable job of examining the constituents of Self and Self-Other relationships in this work, an examination spurred by a representation of bestiality. Beyond his exploration of Self-Other relationships, Albee uses the matter of bestiality to more broadly explore the larger issues of human-animal/ environmental relationships today.

In this context, the Lévinasian notion of ethics can be employed to provide illumination. The Lévinasian notions of *finitude* and *infinity* help to gear the play toward a dialogism between Self and Other— one that is less a specific moral orientation than a necessary ethical mechanism (needed as much as air is needed for survival), implemented for the continuation of both human

and non-human existence— an exploration of love and responsibility. This mechanism implemented for the ultimate elevation of the Other and subjugation of the Self is as tenacious as the scientific principle of *inertia*. That is, just as the inertia principle in physics dictates an object's state of motion, Lévinas's ethics similarly affirms the Self as finite and the Other as infinite. Shifting ethics from a moral/religious discourse into a critical discourse is one of Lévinas's biggest contributions to modern ethics. While many term him a wishful idealist, his ethical insight proves revealing and provocative, leading to a fundamental question of the relation of responsibility between Self and Other, the question that permeates and enlivens Albee's play *The Goat: or, who is Sylvia?*

Following this introductory material, my discussion will proceed through two basic movements. The first section examines *The Goat* and highlights the range of issues it provokes. The second section employs Lévinas's theory to shed light on elements of the play and to show how Lévinas and Albee are in dialogue—specifically, how both speak to today's environmental issues. These efforts, in the end, will lead to a demonstration of Lévinas's ethical theory, how it is not morally oriented (that is, not built on codes or moral legalism) but rather constitutive, a condition or relation between Self and Other, and how such an ethical understanding might preserve both the human and the non-human.

The Goat

Having received three Pulitzer Prizes for drama—for *A Delicate Balance* (1967), *Seascape* (1975), and *Three Tall Women* (1994), Edward Albee stands as a prominent figure of the American theatre. His long-lived status as a leading American playwright, however, does not derive from his endorsement of the-way-things-are. Rather, his works deeply reflect his view that the role of theatre or art is to protest the status quo (Albee SMM, 82). He believes individuals are in trouble if they wish to conform to, instead of contest the norms of society. What art needs to

do, he asserts, is to “stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen” (Sommer “An Overview of Edward Albee's Career.”) He wants art to “change people, to try to bring them into a greater sense of themselves, make them more alive, more self-aware” (Albee SMM, 82). Given these concerns, it is not surprising that human relationships play an important role in his works. From *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) to *The Goat* (2003), Albee has consistently explored issues within middle-class family settings. Such a mundane milieu helps foreground the status quo and its looming social boundaries, with the darker side exposed (i.e., via volatile and abusive relationships, bestiality, etc.) This milieu also makes location and setting highly important. Michael Billington, in his review of the play’s London production, writes: “If Page's production, as a whole, is less effective than the Broadway prototype, it is because it seems curiously deracinated. In New York you could almost smell the Park Avenue affluence of Martin and Stevie's world which made its destruction all the more poignant”. Such commentary focuses on the American aspect of the play but also highlights the economic context, the influence of finance and position. Such grounding moreover grants the work a timely aspect and sense of urgency. As critic Stephen Bottom suggests, Albee's plays are rooted in the here and now rather than in some “imagined, fictional elsewhere” (Bottoms 10).

Indeed “chang[ing] the status quo” seems to be the overarching theme in Albee’s long career. While critics approach his works from various angles in *The Cambridge Companion to Edward Albee*, a consensus emerges that affirms this contestatory aspect. Philip Kolin describes Albee in his early years as an “angry bird of youth” who attacked illusions of identity and the myth of his own country. John Clum looks at how *Tiny Alice*, *A Delicate Balance*, and *Finding the Sun* deal with impotence and marriage—a theme not uncommon among Albee’s works—and concludes that Albee’s characters are burdened with “discontent and disappointment” (Bottoms 73) in their search for spiritual and emotional fulfillment (as well as sexual satisfaction). Both critics

highlight the emotional dissatisfaction precipitates a desire for social change. But Albee is not just a young writer driven by discontent. Examining Albee's award-winning plays, Thomas Adler sees in the writer a call for growth and the embrace of the foreign. He argues that "although change is necessary for growth, it evokes the fear of the unknown.... [These plays] are 'act[s] of aggression against the status quo' (Qtd. in Bottoms 151).

Some audiences appreciate Albee's insistence on challenging ethical boundaries, while others do not. Despite having audiences who "value being challenged and appreciate theater that, if it existed, would fit into the School of Anti-Complacency" (Sommer "An Overview of Edward Albee's Career"), Albee has not always enjoyed success. Albee's failures "at the box office are as well known as his critical successes" (Sommer "An Overview of Edward Albee's Career"). "The string of bombs includes *All Over*, *The Lady from Dubuque*, *The Man Who Had Three Arms*, and adaptations of *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, *Everything in the Garden* and *Lolita*" (Kanfer). Moreover, his ambition to challenge the status quo has sometimes been interpreted as simple provocation and a striving for fame. Literary critic Elysa Gardner, for instance, describes *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* as "perversely impressive," with audiences possibly becoming perplexed and "sickened by the self-indulgent mess, in which *the* cynical, disdainful view of family life that has informed some of *Albee's* more eloquent works reaches its nauseating nadir" (Gardner).

So it seems that what audiences and critics like and what they hate about Albee's work indicate two sides of one coin. While some value his courage to challenge the status quo, others disdain such provocation. Other theatre artists who challenge policies or systems may not be as confrontation as Albee, who tends to touch a raw nerve with regard to "human relationship[s]," the rudiment of all politics, gender, economy and culture. Though he sets his plays in the milieu of mundane daily life, his presentation of human relationships can be disturbing. In an interview with Vicky Hallett, Albee points out that, while *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is less

shocking, with few four-letter words removed, “the real shock is how people treat each other, and that hasn't changed” (Hallett).

Given this basic orientation in Albee’s plays that challenges the status quo, *The Goat* is not thus too surprisingly; it is in keeping with the common attitude of Albee’s oeuvre. In *Stretching My Mind*, Albee explains the impetus behind the work:

I was thinking about writing a play about intertwined matters—the limits of our tolerance of the behavior of others than ourselves, especially when such behavior ran counter to what we believed to be acceptable social and moral boundaries, and our unwillingness to imagine ourselves behaving in such an unacceptable fashion—in other words, our refusal to imagine ourselves subject to circumstances outside our own comfort zones. (SMM, 259)

This statement suggests that we should not look at what is superficial in human relationships, but look to investigate how humans define their codes and conditions of belonging. The dramatization of bestiality in short puts the spotlight on such fundamental concerns and questions. In other words, the intertwined matters Albee hints at involve a complicated convergence of epistemology, domestic politics, and human definition. Having Sylvia in the title and as the target of the drama’s discussion, *The Goat* not only suggests reconsideration of the human/ non-human relationship, but also the role theatre plays in such contemplation.

While reconsideration of the human / non-human relationship has been discussed widely in ecological discourse, the critical combination of environment and theatre has developed rather slowly in theatre studies, as theatre artist Theresa J. May points out. This may be because theatre has been defined as a representation of human actions and the space where such actions are staged, as English professor Una Chaudhuri speculates. May elaborates on this point by stating that: “Literary studies has a long tradition of criticism that examines the signification of landscape and nature imagery and a body of canonical texts” (“Beyond Bambi” 97). However, theatre studies do not have such a tradition. May argues that the basic epistemology evident in

conventional theatre regards “nature Other” as an object, a domain domesticated through an anthropocentric lens. May, however, correctly challenges this view, reminding us that “All constructions of ‘nature’ are ideological” (May “Beyond Bambi” 97).

In order to re-conceive this Other, May defines “Ecocriticism”: “[it] is a critical (discursive) perspective on cultural performance (from theatre, film, and literature to zoos, amusement parks, and social protests) afforded and informed by the science of ecology and the greening fire it has precipitated across disciplines” (May “Beyond Bambi” 97). Along this line of thought then, theatre— I should reconsider its conventional outlooks and its passivity and should re-position itself in this ecocritical revolution. In *Staging Place: The Geography Of Modern Drama*, Chaudhuri gives one example of how theatre can act as a cultural site of resistance to traditional epistemology. As embodied on the naturalistic stage, theatre privileges vision. The fact that realism and naturalism dominate theatre, rendering visibility as the primary organizer of performer-audience experience, illuminates the fact that theatre is an extension of an anthropocentric epistemology (the human viewpoint dominates). In her discussion of Jim Cartwright's *Road* (1986), a play that demystifies the erasure of Otherness practiced in naturalistic theatre of visibility, Chaudhuri writes: “The theatre’s investment in presence, visibility and display is revealed in *Road* to be an illusion. . . a fantasy of anthropological dimensions that seeks to vanquish otherness without the pain of being othered oneself” (Chaudhuri “(De)Facing the Animals” 53). Chaudhuri thus argues for new theatrical investigations and for an understanding of humans being in the world that does not over-value the status of the human.

In her review of *Staging Place: The Geography Of Modern Drama*, Jeanne Colleran points out the spatial dimension of the Self-Other epistemology, and her observation is helpful

when reconsidering Albee's dramatic work, his fascination with "intertwined matters" in the relationships of the human and non-human:

Social spaces are largely spaces of containment: places where strictures are set upon the body particularly by means of that which houses the body; strictures that determine what may enter, what may remain, what cohabit, what abide. The pervasive fears at the end of one millennium and the beginning of another revolve around the fragility of these social spaces: how much difference, after all, can be accommodated? (238)

This quote gives emphasis to the elements of boundaries and containment. And the fact that Sylvia the goat is only allowed to appear on stage as a carcass serves as a kind of reply to Colleran's question above. While Albee's play challenges conventional structures of human belonging—of what difference can be accommodated, the play does not completely abandon human social space (though the presence of the dead goat invites fear and disruption). The goat—as a kind of co-equal presence—is banned from the stage; she is banned from what theatre symbolizes. Theatre here embodies the epistemological site of human activities where she is only allowed to fulfill certain roles. Given the conventional outlook of theatre, it is almost impossible to represent non-human/nature.

It is therefore difficult to envision a kind of theatre that yokes human performance and non-human/nature together in a performing space. In effect, if conventional theatre gives a representation of reality through a human lens, how is it possible that non-human/nature might be performed for the sake of itself, instead of human interest? Or, is performance even possible when trying to recast the human/ non-human relationship? In *Performing Nature*, editors Gabriella Giannachi and Nigel Stewart suggest ecocritical study in theatre must necessarily be "hybrid and interdisciplinary," even though it remains "fraught with epistemological uncertainty and controversy" (19).

Certainly theatre studies should explore new approaches and strategies in how the theatre form might accommodate new understandings of the human/non-human relationship. Albee's play does not stand as a formal or stylistic experiment. His play retains a conventional theatrical approach in style and method. Nonetheless, *The Goat* highlights discourse and dramatic action that challenges conventional viewpoints; the play also promises new potentials for ethical reconsideration and a new model of epistemology. Such difficult subject matter can raise issues from a variety of angles, and not all critics have come to a common interpretation of the play.⁴² Commenting on the London production at the Almeida Theatre, Michael Portillo asks in his review why adultery is de rigueur while bestiality is taboo. Michael Billington, identifies a different concern and writes that "Albee implies there is a malaise affecting American society; but he never exactly defines the source of the unhappiness motivating Martin and the fellow-sufferers he meets at a therapy session" (Billington). Regardless of the different critical responses to the play, and the different problems they point to, critics rightly note the Albee's play concerns human tolerance. Albee's play asks a number of provocative and demanding questions, ones that bear upon the limits of human thinking and the extent of human belonging. Since bestiality is not something unheard of,⁴³ what is so intolerable about it? Is it intolerable because an elite like Martin should not be taking part in it?⁴⁴ In that case, what does Martin's social status symbolize? Is social status a parameter influencing human-animal relationships, in the construction of humanity itself?

Overall, nature/animals are never recognized as absolute Others. Una Chaudhuri observes that "[a]s pets, as performers, and as literary symbols, animals are forced to perform for us. . . . Refusing the animal its radical otherness by ceaselessly troping it and rendering it a metaphor for

⁴² See "Review of the Goat."

⁴³ See Tanya Gold's "A goat's eyes are so beautiful."

⁴⁴ Michael Kuchwara describes the character Martin as "The fair-haired Pullman [actor who plays Martin], dressed in a crisp, buttoned-down blue shirt and striped, preppy tie, is all WASP good looks." ("Review of the Goat")

humanity, modernity erases the anima even as it makes it discursively ubiquitous" (“(De)Facing the Animals” 105). Albee’s play invites questioning about the status of the animal as Other. The play’s action investigates how the Self-Other relationship and the treatment of the Other shape human subjectivity. The issues addressed are indeed intertwined, and the subject, as Albee indicates, is not bestiality per se, but how human epistemology decides our perception of the Self/human versus the Other/non-human. With Albee affirming an attitude that calls for a disengaged regard for human behavior, the play’s plot highlights discussion of normalcy and its implicit hierarchies, a discussion that invites analysis via Lévinas’s notion of the Self-Other relationship (in this case, human vs. nonhuman). That is, as Albee strives to provoke people into rethinking who and what they are, we note the play’s concern with ethics (as Lévinas emphasizes an ethical relationship with the Other). Thus, Albee is dramatically exploring territory that is consonant with Lévinas, whose work and thoughts can provide an alternative vision for twenty-first century relationships.

In the play, what is intolerable is, of course, Martin’s “affair” with Sylvia the goat. His insufficient justifications for this behavior make it even more insufferable. Paradoxically, his persuasion could never be sufficient because human language/discourse is a product of human subjectivity. It is finally incapable of describing experiences outside of that subjectivity. While this “discourse of normalcy” collapses once it is seen outside the territory (of Self’s interiority), it serves as a testament to the way the Self/interiority/finitude treats and looks at the Other/exteriority/infinity. “A roasted lamb chop served on the dinner table” and “falling in love with Sylvia the goat” register two drastically different phenomena in light of different ethical moments of Self-Other relationship. The two behaviors generate different ontological relationships with animals and present philosophical issues about what is normal.

What is “Face”?

In terms of Lévinas’s theory of “Face,” the situation of a “roasted lamb chop” would give evidence of an act of violence and would witness to the de-facing of the Other. Contrarily, the situation of “falling in love with a goat” would demonstrate the power of the Other’s Face. The issue of importance here is what happens to the Self and how the Self reacts when the Other’s Face appears.

First of all, what is “Face”? In *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas sets forth his distinct theory of “exteriority and the Face” in section III, after discussion of the violence of the Same and Totality in the previous two sections. In this section, Lévinas proposes that it is the notion of the “Face” that illuminates the idea of “infinity”—what is outside human knowledge. Lévinas writes: “The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither seen nor touched” (Lévinas TI, 194). The Face not only escapes any reach of the senses, which construct an ontological comprehension of the world, but is also beyond our epistemological understanding. It is “...not resplendent as a form clothing a content, as an image, but as the nudity of the principle, behind which there is nothing further” (Lévinas TI, 262). Here the form can be seen as tantamount to a (human) teleology of a being. For instance, a goat is for lamb chops, as a cow is for beef, etc. However, a goat is a goat. It is itself the purpose of its own existence (instead of existing for human interest). In this way of thinking, the meeting of Self and the Other is not limited to dining tables, as myriad human activities activate a process of subsumption, demanding that the Other yield to the Same/thematization. As Noreen O’Connor, in his “The Personal Is Political: Discursive Practice of the Face-to-Face”, explains it, “to move the notion of encounter outside the representationalism of intuition and concept to the dimension of separation. The face-to-face relationship both maintains distance and interrupts all

totalities. Hence, the face is not a presence announcing an unsaid which, in principle, could be said” (62).

Barbara Jane Davy believes Lévinas’s nudity of the Face refers to things that exist beyond all thematization, and hence are part of “infinity.” To “thematize” means to comprehend the Other under the Self’s epistemology and to reject any other possible existence of the Other itself. Because the Other’s absolute alterity cannot be understood within that epistemological frame at all, it is outside the Self’s finitude/interiority. She argues, however, that “all other entities exceed our ideas about them. It is not possible to exhaust the details of a thing in description. I can describe a tree as a red maple thirty feet tall, brilliant red in the fall... These details do not fully describe everything that the tree is” (51). Davy aims to argue that “[the] nakedness of the Other in terms of thematization should not restrict Lévinas’s understanding of the face to the human” (51), an observation that highlights how the face appears when the Self’s “prison fortress,” in Nietzsche’s words, collapses.⁴⁵ In other words, the Face is/appears as something beyond linguistic and epistemological ontology, and disappears when ontological interpretation is imposed. As Jeffrey L. Kosky indicates, language is essentially an interpellation or an invocation, and its approach “. . . is not conditioned by a horizon wherein it appears” (18).

At one time or another, we’ve all shared this common experience: when one intends to “write down” something he/she feels—for instance, an inextractable emotion encapsulated in one or more events, images, or memories, etc.—it is often the case that the linguistic representation is not able to represent completely, if not betray, the original experience, emotion, etc. In this case, the web of meaning takes away the original context of the feeling, and moves the experiential context to a linguistic one. This example illustrates how linguistic/epistemological attempts at expression can fail to encapsulate the meanings of all beings or experiences. It also

⁴⁵ See “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense-1873.”

implies how meaning/existence of the Other can be twisted or fabricated to suit the Self's own interest. Given this situation, fundamental questions emerge; for instance, when the Face appears, should the Self confront it or de-face it?

This confrontation with the Face of the Other then gets to the core of Lévinas's ethical theory. For Lévinas, subjectivity is formed through an ethical relationship, i.e., social relations, with the Other. Without the Other, "I" would not come into existence. O'Connor writes: "Without the proximity of the other in the face everything would be absorbed in Being. . . totalities absorbing the very subject to which it is unconcealed" (63). In other words, the reason why "I" can stand out as a distinct entity is the recognition that there are "other" distinct entities. Without the Other, "I" am but part of Being and the concept of "I" does not exist. Hence, to maintain the distinctness of "I," I have to make sure the network of other distinct entities form a distinctness of their own. Samuel Moyn believes Lévinas borrowed the concept of the Face from Rosenzweig,⁴⁶ whose concept Lévinas shifts from divinity to humanity, and that he transposes the Other from Descartes' idea of God to social relations. Hence, the Other refers not only to the idea of God, but also to other people. Lévinas writes: "The eyes break through the mask—the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks" (Lévinas TI, 66). The face, the epiphanic moment when infinity descends to finitude, is both fragile and holy. "In the face the Other expresses his eminence, the dimension of height and divinity from which he descends. In his gentleness dawns his strength and his right" (Lévinas TI, 262).

If, as Lévinas argues, the "face" discloses the façade of one's identity, then de-facing the Other risks a defacing of the Self. While Lévinas's notion of Face does not imply an actual face but rather a metaphorical one, registering a moment when the Self loses its rational grasp of

⁴⁶ Rosenzweig describes God's loving gaze as "not the basic form of his countenance, fixed and immutable. It is not the rigid mask that the sculptor lifts from off the face of the dead. Rather it is the fleeting, indefatigable alteration of mien, the ever youthful radiance that plays on the eternal features. Love hesitates to make a likeness of the lover; the portrait would reduce the living countenance to rigor mortis" (Moyn 253).

reality, one can point to a literal and metaphorical appearance of the Face in Albee's *The Goat*, where the Face of Sylvia is not allowed on stage but where her de-facing at the end of the play signals the danger of human subjectivity in its relation to the ecological order.

Set in the cozy suburb home of a modern middle-class family, the play is composed of three scenes. Martin (the father) is an outstanding architect who has just turned fifty and just won an award for urban design. He has a great family, a successful career and a good old friend. At first, Martin and his wife Stevie show a deep trust and confidence in each other. Both accept, if not passionately embrace, the fact that their son is a homosexual. The story unfolds with the couple talking about daily chores, with Stevie delicately bantering about possibilities of Martin's affair, while awaiting Ross, Martin's best friend, to conduct an interview with Martin. Martin's first confession to Stevie about Sylvia, his goat-lover, is passed off as a joke. Later, when Stevie leaves Ross and Martin to their interview, however, Martin's unusual forgetfulness and absent-mindedness, together with a photo of Sylvia, all point to a more plausible account of an extramarital affair. Despite Martin's plea to keep the thing private, Ross writes to Stevie with dogmatic self-justification.

The second scene witnesses the face-off between husband and wife. Stevie and Ross alike represent defenders of tradition and normalcy. With mixed feelings of shock, confusion, anger, frustration and contempt, Stevie nonetheless keeps her fury and uneasy feelings in control. Even her breaking of bowls and pottery is carried out in a civilized manner. Martin's reassurance of his love for Stevie is nevertheless juxtaposed with his untarnished affection toward Sylvia, which drives Stevie to further fury.

In scene three, Stevie has removed herself from the house, leaving another family member (their son Billy) to confront and deal with the fact of Martin's bestial relationship. Although Billy reveals his frustration toward his father, he also shows his love. In one

unexpected moment, they embrace, and Billy uncontrollably gives Martin a sexual kiss. This kiss is witnessed by Ross, who displays his contempt. Martin hates Ross's sanctimoniousness, as the three effectively proceed to tear each other apart. The play ends with Stevie coming back after the quarrel, displaying the carcass of Sylvia, which she has murdered; Stevie thus makes good threat to Martin at the end of scene two: "I'll bring you down with me!" (44).

When looking at the many plays in Albee's career, swearing appears quite frequently in his works. Aiming to change the status quo, Albee understands how repressive the status quo can be, and he thus values and dramatizes different transgressions and the flaunting of the taboo—swearing thus can function as a transgression and as an emotional outlet. Swearing, however, may imply that individuals are constrained by the status quo and dare not venture into transgression (which may be considered abnormal); they thus swear out of frustration. Many of Albee's plays thus reveal complicated characters, individuals both repressed and outraged, who must grapple with the negotiation of normalcy and abnormality.

Among all the entangled emotions that the other characters express toward Martin, disdain is the one that stands out most. If, as Albee once mentioned, that *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was a gentle way to say "fuck you" (Qtd. in Drimmer), then *The Goat* conveys such a sentiment in more emphatic terms. The play seems to warrant its torrent of profanity, given the explosive sexual context. Stevie voices vehement disdain of her husband. In scene two, Stevie's frequent tirades have multiple connotations. They not only serve as a recurrent reminder bestiality, but they indicate how she can only process the relationship through a frame of sexual discourse. Stevie shouts variously: "You told me! You came right out and fucking told me, and I laughed. . . I fucking laughed!" (28); "The fucking of animals!" (29); "Goat-fuckers Anonymous?" (32); "What is she fucking? Who?" (33); "GET YOUR GOAT-FUCKING HANDS OFF ME!!!" (37), and "animal fucker" (42). Such profanities have multiple meanings.

They not only point to Martin's socially intolerable behavior, but also indicate Stevie's emotional progression, from passive wrath to aggressive attack. Further, Martin's restraint of using the term "fucking" expresses something about his attitude toward Sylvia and also discloses something about this wife, who seems addicted to profanity.

STEVIE. I'm your type and so is she; so is the goat. (Harder.) So long as it's female, eh? So long as it's got a cunt it's all right with you!

MARTIN. (Huge.) A SOUL!! Don't you know the difference!?! Not a cunt, a soul!

STEVIE. (After a little; tears again.) You can't fuck a soul.

MARTIN. No; and it isn't about fucking.

STEVIE. YES!! (42)

While Martin never utters this word, he cannot blunt Ross and Stevie's accusations and their contemptuous categorization of his behavior. Despite this disdain, Martin does attempt to adopt self-help measures: he joins a bestiality support group on the Internet, and he confides his secret in Ross in order to gain more time for "healing." Ross and Stevie's attitudes, however, remain consistent. Ross keeps calling Martin "sick" and exhibits sneering condescension.

MARTIN. . . Don't you and your son ever kiss? Don't you and—what's his name?—Todd love one another?

ROSS. (Hard; contemptuous.) Not that way!

MARTIN. (Angry and reckless.) That way!?! What way!?! . . .

ROSS. (A sneer.) You're sicker than I thought. (50-51)

Ross nor Stevie share a common viewpoint of disdain and show abhorrence at Martin's relationship. They react to him with derision and tacitly uphold a civilized disposition. Even in extreme emotion, they represent a commitment to commonsense, to rationality and normalcy. Their high social rank further deepens their investment in the status quo. Their social position

makes Martin's behavior even more intolerable. From Ross and Stevie's point of view, it is clear that abiding norms are deep-rooted and demand allegiance. For them, showing disdain for abnormality is the best way for them to signal their own normality. Such a response, the mechanism of disdain, nurtures a tendency that works to de-face the Other.

Representing the Lévinasian notion of Face, Sylvia and her look exist outside of this thematization of rationality. Throughout the play Sylvia's face never appears on stage, but her (Lévinasian) Face is never absent. When Martin describes how he and Sylvia exchange the look, Sylvia's Face automatically surfaces (in the audience's mind). It lingers until the play ends because the play is about how Martin searches for possible ways to introduce Sylvia's Face in scene one, how Stevie (and possibly Martin) attempt to understand who Sylvia is in scene two, and how Sylvia is de-faced by Stevie in scene three. While Stevie is preoccupied with the mechanical problems involved in human-animal intercourse, Martin is infatuated with Sylvia's looks.

MARTIN. . . . it was then that I saw her. (Sees it) Just...just looking at me.

...

ROSS. All right; let me help you. You're seeing her.

MARTIN. (Sad laugh.) Yes; oh, yes; I'm seeing her.

ROSS. You're having an affair with her.

MARTIN. (Confused.) A what? Having a what!? (23)

Apparently Martin and Ross "see" differently here. Ross equates Martin's seeing some woman with having an extramarital affair. Martin, however, whose symptoms of amnesia are constantly reiterated throughout the play, is overpowered by the sight of absolute Otherness, that evoked by Sylvia's appearance. Martin's amnesia symbolizes his gradual withdrawal from common sense,

or traditional epistemologies, and this removal somehow empowers him, allowing him access to the Other.

To Ross and Stevie, Martin's affair with Sylvia the goat is preposterous, an affair that evokes fear, disgust and contempt. Sylvia's appearance and her eyes demonstrate their ultimate power over Martin and the uncanny way the goat captures his attention. Her mysterious power is also manifest through the many epistemological and ontological questions Stevie raises. Stevie asks whether goats cry (30). While Martin emphasizes Sylvia's looks, Stevie wonders how Sylvia puts down her forelegs, turning her head to greet her husband (42). Martin, on the other hand, protests that he will not reveal any details of their intercourse. All attempts to ridicule, understand, pin down, or escape Sylvia's Face only tears the couple apart.

Chaudhuri analyzes Martin's situation in *The Goat* and points out: "Martin's case this pinnacle is, like so much else in the play, literal as well as figurative, with the literal being insistently associated with animality" ("(De)Facing the Animals" 11). This fusion of the literal and the figural—this animality that escapes our epistemology—may be viewed as a moment that invokes the Lévinasian Face. The affair haunts the stage with a ubiquitous curiosity, generating mixed feelings over the destabilized boundary of human normalcy, making the Face omnipresent and omnipotent, and hence serving as a sign of transcendence.

I would here relate how discussion following a recent production of the play corroborates this assessment, how the goat—conveying the effect of the Face—produces anxiety concerning the flux of normalcy and social boundaries. In a discussion session after a performance at the Baton Rouge Little Theatre (April, 2008), a member of the audience mentioned how normalcy fluctuates over time. He noted that Martin's treatment might compare to how homosexuals were treated forty years ago, and he humorously suggested that there might be an animated version of Albee's *The Goat* in Disney production another forty years from now. This post-production

discussion points to issues about how human's emotions and affections are conditioned through mechanisms of social authority and common sense/normalcy; it also reveals how norms are codified and how they can change with time.

At the play's conclusion, Stevie's ritual murder of Sylvia affirms the power of normalcy, the social map Martin once inhabited but subsequently vacated. When Billy asks Martin about what the aftermath of the affair will be, Martin responds with blank confusion: "I don't know, Billy; I don't know that there are any rules for where we are" (47). While the affair has imploded common sense, the play indicates the drive to retain humanity and harness human behavior, to keep "interior reality" (human rationality) intact (that is, the characters still believe their "reality" overcomes all). The characters are disorientated when the Faces surfaces, forcing them to confront the daunting "exteriority" where there are no directions or rules for them to follow. As Chaudhuri points out, "... the blood on Stevie's dress at the end of Albee's play, stains the pristine surface of a desubstantialized humanism and its enabling genres" ("(De)Facing the Animals" 18). Common sense/rationality serves as the dominant principle deciding the direction of interior reality, a gravity that pulls in the core of reality.

Hence the murder acts as a reinstatement of normalcy, a means of checking the sense of disorientation. For Stevie, "A goat killed" should be a drastically different matter from "an affair exposed." Mixing the two together produces an epistemological earthquake that engulfs Stevie. It is, however, more this epistemological betrayal rather than the affair itself that disorients Stevie. So a divorce, as Billy suggests, cannot be the solution. It must rather be a fierce means, like murder, to restore interior reality, or the "order of things"—wherein animals often function as symbols (an order where an animal's carcass on a plate is a normal picture).

Thus, Sylvia is the scapegoat for normalcy, just as Martin is a scapegoat for the desire to change the status quo, these impulses characterize the essential tragedy here. Indeed, with the

deployment of the goat, the change of status quo, and the subtitle “notes toward a definition of tragedy,” *The Goat* seems to invoke the Dionysian origin of theatre. In ancient Greece, “the word ‘tragedy’ derives from ‘songs sung by goat-men’, i.e., members of the cult of Dionysius” (“Goat song”). Professor Rita Felski points out that Greek tragedy was “often hailed as an exemplary source of insight into ethical and philosophical questions; in its very remoteness from the present, it could throw light on the dilemmas of modernity” (v). She also refers to Dennis J. Schmidt’s *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* when arguing that “the growing self-doubt of philosophy, the questioning of reason, analytical method, and conceptual knowledge as primary values, has much to do with the turn to tragedy, as the form that most eloquently dramatizes the stubborn persistence of human blindness, vulnerability, and error” (v). Because tragedy remains the site of cultural transformation, negotiation, struggle and change, the play brings out the Lévinasian notion of Face to demonstrate a need for destabilization of the status quo. When the alterity of absolute Otherness descends, Martin can only subjugate himself to this epiphany.

MARTIN. . . . it was as if an alien came out of whatever it was, and it...took me with it, and it was...an ecstasy and a purity, and a ...love of a ...*(Dogmatic.)* un-i-mag-in-able kind, and it relates to nothing whatever, to nothing that can be related to! Don’t you see!? Don’t you see the...don’t’ you see the “thing” that happened to me? What nobody understands? Why I can’t feel what I’m supposed to!? Because it relates to nothing? It can’t have happened!. . . (39)

Western theatre captures this moment of cultural throe through the tragic epiphany when a new ethics is about to be born. In this aspect, it celebrates Dionysian spirits that release the sexual drive from social bounds. Through such change, it actually anticipates a positive future of

fertility. The goat song (Greek word root for “tragedy”) celebrates a release from rationality. Through such throes issues a positive hope for a negotiable, if not better, future. The goat/Dionysian not only suggests a destructive side, it also fosters possibilities of fertility.⁴⁷

The relationship between Martin and Billy is curious in the play. If Martin (Sylvia) symbolizes the scapegoat of normalcy, Billy appears to be the marginalized lost sheep when it comes to (socially acceptable) “sexuality,” as humanity is de-orientated from normalcy. Martin’s attitude, from repressed contempt, to reconciliation, to a final active defense for his son, illuminates his breaking through the bounds of normalcy. This movement further signals a total surrender of finitude to infinity, through suggesting that love/tolerance (for the Other/unknown) should come before an epistemological ontology. As Lévinas notes, ethics is the first philosophy.

When Stevie confronts Martin’s affair in scene two, we see Martin, stressed, ranting rudely to Billy about his sexuality. This expression suggests that Martin had feigned acceptance of his son’s homosexuality in order to maintain the façade of a lovely family. Meanwhile, Martin’s rudeness over Billy’s sexuality almost makes Stevie laugh, but Martin does not seem to be aware of this. Which is more laughable— homosexuality or bestiality? Martin is never aware of this contradiction as an issue until well into scene three, where he reconciles with Billy. In scene three, Billy inquires as to the whereabouts of Stevie. In a trance, Martin recalls what Stevie said at the end of scene two: “You have brought me down, and, Christ! I’ll bring you down with me!” (44). Billy seems to not quite understand what Stevie means by this statement,

⁴⁷ Jennifer Wise, in her “Tragedy as “An Augury of a Happy Life,” argues that fifth-century Greek tragedy functioned as an augury of happiness. In Aristotle’s time, however, these tetralogies were stripped of their celebratory and other civic elements, fifth-century tragedies came to look like “one-act tear-jerkers, merely sad stories of the deaths of kings.” This type of play transformed a propitious political art into a weepy histrionic one, hence produced Aristotle’s otherwise perplexing “sad-ending” theory of tragedy. Albee’s title of *The Goat: or, Who is Sylvia?* (*Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy*) then responds to this controversy of whether a tragedy should point to a better or more miserable future.

but his complaint about Martin's behavior is actually the same accusation leveled by Martin, who "brings him down from normalcy".

BILLY. . . . the talk I was going to do at school became history. . . What will I say now!? Goodness me!. . . I came home yesterday and everything had been great—absolutely normal, therefore great. Great parents, great house, great trees, great cars—you know: the old "great." . . . But then. . . a letter from great good friend Ross written to great good Mom about how great good Dad has been out in the barnyard fucking animals! (49)

Stirred by Martin's changing attitudes toward homosexuality, Martin's own affair, and his natural love toward his parent, Billy experiences confusion and his perception of love/sexuality is distorted. Embraced by Martin, Billy places a sexual kiss on his father's mouth. At that moment, Ross comes in and witnesses the scene of forbidden incestuous love. Ross's contempt enhances Martin's angry outburst:

BILLY. (*To Ross*) It wasn't what you think!

MARTIN. (*At Billy.*) Yes! Yes, it was! Don't apologize. (*To Ross.*) Too bad you couldn't have brought your fucking TV crew over!

...

MARTIN. ...This boy is hurt! I've hurt him and he still loves me! You fucker! He loves his father, and if it...clicks over and becomes—what?—sexual for...just a moment...so what!? So fucking what!? He's hurt and he's lonely and mind your own fucking business! (50)

Despite being deeply mired in loneliness, confusion, and despair, Martin boldly resists the imposition of normalcy (which Ross embodies here). Because he has experienced Billy's lonely position, fatherly love surges in Martin. He departs from Ross's viewpoint and embraces

the lost sheep—represented by his son and himself. He diverts this sexuality away from the domain of Normalcy to the simpler issue of love and suffering. His realization heralds a Lévinasian moment, suggesting that ethics/love should come before a dominant social epistemology (that manifest in Normalcy). This insight explains Martin’s later furious remark about Ross’s behavior:

MARTIN. (*At Ross; growing rage.*) I’ll tell you what’s sick! Writing that fucking letter to Stevie—why doesn’t matter!!—that’s what’s sick! I tell you about it; I share it with you . . . because I think I’ve lost it, maybe; I tell you; I share it with you because you’re . . .what!? . . .you’re my best friend in the whole world? Because I needed to tell somebody, somebody with his head on straight enough to hear it? I tell you, and you fucking turn around and...

ROSS. *I had to!!*

MARTIN. No! You didn’t! You didn’t have to!

ROSS. (*Dogmatic.*) I couldn’t let you continue!

MARTIN. (*Near tears.*) I could have worked it out. I could have stopped, and no one would have known. Except you motherfucker. Mister on strike and you’re out. I could have. .. (52)

Here, Martin exposes the ethical moment that confronted Ross: he could have chosen to confirm common sense (the inflexible right-or-wrong stance), or he could have chosen to protect his best friend by granting some leeway. Ross, apparently, has chosen the former. Ross takes on the value (violence?) inherited from the ontological epistemology instead of any ethical consideration. Martin makes a good argument, that because Ross fails love (friendship) and condemns the Other (Martin’s bestiality), he disrupts and ruins Martin’s family. This accusation points to Ross’s guilt and the fact that he cannot escape blame in the name of Normalcy. In a

Lévinasian sense, Martin's reproach foregrounds Ross's situation at an ethical crossroads. From this ethical viewpoint, Ross's response toward a fragile Other (Martin's confidence) and its consequences helps drive the story and informs its violent conclusion.

Lévinas and Animals (The Ethical Position)

In a sense, this ethical moment that Ross faces is what humanity faces today. The Other (i.e., Martin's affair) is fragile, and its fate is held in Ross's hand. Exposing the secret brings about accusation and shame, and this labeling is a great harm to his best friend. However, for him, aligning with the "inside law" appears morally correct; therefore Ross insists that he must tell Stevie in order to stop Martin's affair. On the other hand, for Ross to reside in this comfort zone at the expense of Martin's family is not ethically sound.

Ross's behaviors indicate an epistemology that retains its comfort zone at the expense of the Other. In other words, the Self/interior reality constructs itself through an elimination of the Other. Lévinas however affirms that the Self's construction is in fact based on the Other. Here I will first show how the play echoes Lévinas's thinking, and how it is relevant to today's human/non-human relationship. I will then discuss the meaning of Lévinas's assertive "ethical yes," something rarely addressed in philosophical studies.

From an ethical perspective, Ross is the antithesis of Martin. As mentioned, Ross only feels comfortable residing in the "comfort zone." The most normal person, he represents a strict codification of mainstream thinking. Ross believes all the men around him have affairs outside their families, which makes Martin's fidelity to his wife look unusual. It is implied that Ross is something of a TV program producer, with references to the interview and his TV crew, etc. He is good at capturing and representing what is "real" and "true." This designation makes Ross's outlook rely more on "vision," aligning him with traditional epistemology. In contrast, Martin is a bold adventurer who is willing to explore the unknown. As the play begins, Martin is just

winning the Pritzker Prize, which will commission him to design “World City, the two hundred billion dollar dream city of the future. . . and set to rise in the wheatfields of our Middle West” (13). It is, as Medoff points out, a city “out of nothing, in the heartland of the US” (164). While Martin is able and willing to deal with any unknown, with that which goes beyond the present (moment), Ross cannot demonstrate such flexibility and cannot embrace a (new) relationship out of nothing.

This feature of Martin’s character points to Lévinas’s suggestion that a relationship with the Other is a relationship with the future. In this case, Martin is the one who lets his imagination fly, and is willing to face the Other/future. This future is not an anticipation of the what-will-be kind of future defined by tradition, but a Levinasian future—a future that is totally unknown, has no relevancy to the present⁴⁸, and is “out of nothing.” Through their conversation, Martin appears to be different from “other men,” the type represented by Ross. He has never had an extramarital affair (before this bestiality). When he is in love, he is absolutely faithful and devoted. He tells Ross how he cannot “perform” on one of their past playboy excursions.

MARTIN. I was already in love with Stevie and I didn’t know how much.

ROSS. Amazing Theory: The heart rules the dick. I always thought that the
dick was driven by ... (19)

Their difference also reflects on their ethical stances, their responses to the Face of the Other. While Martin subjugates himself to the Other at the expense of his reputation and his family, Ross refutes the Other at the expense of his life-long friendship with Martin. Martin’s subjugation to the Other risks his reputation, social status, career and his relationship with his family and friends. In short, his subjugation to the Other is hazardous to his identity. The fact that his encounter with Sylvia takes place after his prestigious award is ironic. Martin’s

⁴⁸ See chapter on Hwang for detailed discussion of Lévinasian concept of “time.”

imagining of the World City out of nowhere illuminates a Cartesian effort to be independent from God. That is, humanity strives to create something that has no reference to what already exists—not airplanes that imitate birds, for instance—something that bears absolutely no history, no traces of the Other/God. Therefore this prize proves Martin’s ability to be truly “independent” from the Other. However, shortly after this independence, Martin loses himself.

The symptom of losing his social self is his constant forgetfulness, which signals a slippage of past memories and identity that makeup who he is at the moment. That is, when Martin “reaches” the city out of nowhere and becomes “the author of himself,” he sheds his old identity. However, does this refer to an emancipated Self or a disorientation? In depicting Martin’s succumbing to the Other, the absolute alterity, Albee seems to hint that when the Self reaches the state where there are no Others, it can only meet with dissolution and destruction. This explains why Martin feels “diminished” (48) when he reaches the pinnacle of his career—when he is at the point where he can swell his ego. Also, at the onset of the interview, Ross compliments him: “you’re at the pinnacle of your success.” Martin then “considers that” and responds: “You mean it’s all downhill from here?” (14). In sum then, Albee suggests that a city out of nowhere proves not an achievement but an expression of human hubris, a pride that eliminates our dependence on the Other, thus begetting the disaster of human subjectivity.

Like the insulting parrot in Walcott’s “First True Creole,” humanity imitates everything. Humanity is never original.⁴⁹ If it ever desires to be or believes it is, Albee indicates, it only

⁴⁹ Chaudhuri describes Walcott’s “First True Creole”: “If Albee puts the goat back in scapegoat, exposing the sacrificial logic of humanism, Walcott’s ‘First True Creole’ puts the goat, one might say, back in goat curry, and celebrates the animal as provisioner, resource, and raw material—not sacrificed to fantasies of human exceptionalism and transcendence but engaged with in a struggle for survival, yielding understanding, respect, and gratitude. Jackson’s unsentimental celebration of Crusoe’s mastery of his world through mastery of the animal body is contrasted with Trewe’s reaction to an animal killing by Jackson himself. Throughout the play, Jackson has complained about the hotel’s resident parrot, who, he says, taunts him with racist epithets. Harry merrily denies the allegation, saying that the parrot is not insulting Jackson but only repeating the name of former owner of the hotel, a German named Heinigger! When Jackson finally wrings the parrot’s neck and throws its body into the ocean, Harry’s anger leads him to make the following exceedingly unusual insult: You people create nothing. You imitate

incurs its own destruction, because it not only allows a drastic severing from the Other (thereby disorienting itself), but sends itself into a blind arrogance (which justifies and glorifies in its violence). If violence gradually takes over, to become a new measurement of humanity, a primary principle of the order of things, then the human realm is likely to go terribly awry. In other words, if humans do not admit and respect the Other (non-human) as a core aspect of its own constitution, its “selfness” will dissolve in the subjugation of the Other into its own epistemology. If finitude wishes to claim infinity, it is only for self-deception.

Such an epistemology is also reflected in an ecological context, leading us back to the issue of ethics between humans and non-humans. The human Other is not limited to animals but the whole of the natural world; food chains serve as a constant reminder of the stratification of species and their interrelations between one another. As mentioned earlier, Robbins, in *Diet For a New America*, alerts us to the fact that the human species is now in jeopardy because of our lifestyles—a meat-oriented diet consumes a majority of the corn and oats we grow; the unethical raising and butchering of animals produces unhealthy meat; and chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides not only hurt our health but also the Earth’s sustainability. Added to this is the controversy over whether the emission of carbon dioxide causes global warming and will lead to a drastic change of the global climate. All these issues suggest a profound, ethical relation between the human and non-human worlds.

In *Diet For a New America*, Robbins describes why the Self in its current lifestyle feels threatened from the Other. Much like Stevie’s fear of abnormality, such fear invades our sense of reality and rationality. Robbins writes: “Because the raising of livestock requires a much greater use of resources, it puts us in a situation where there is not enough to go around. In this kind of

everything. It’s all been done before, you see, Jackson. The parrot. Think that’s something? It’s from *The Seagull*. It’s from *Miss Julie*. [He might have added, its from *The Wild Duck*, its from *Trifles*—birds drop like flies in modern drama]. You can’t ever be original, boy.” (“(De)Facing the Animals” 17-18).

dilemma there lurks a *fear* in us all that we will be the one who won't get enough" (my emphasis; 354). This fear leads to violence among the human species, transforming the original infinite resources into something finite, and making competition a must.⁵⁰ This transformation is furthered through globalized capitalism, which objectifies non-human bodies by commodifying nature. When water is bottled and priced, its infinity becomes finite, and access to it fosters competition, plunder, and the fear of not having enough. Theresa J. May points out that "*The Goat* explodes species taboos by offending our sense of absolute difference, illuminates the role of human desire in the commodification of nature..." ("Beyond Bambi" 98). What May terms as "absolute difference" is what Lévinas holds as the "face." The commodification of nature itself also demonstrates the violence the Self imposes on nature/the Other. In sum, finitude is what causes competition and fear. Making something infinite into something finite is a historical process demonstrating human arrogance and hubris.

The process of making infinite (resources) into finite (resources) corresponds to the subjugation of the infinite Other before the finite Self. When the finite Self cannot digest the vastness of the infinite Other, the Self is most likely to experience anxiety—asserting different forms of resource allocation and imposing needless panic (of not having enough). This explains why Lévinas does not consider the Self's infinite responsibility toward the Other a moral exhortation but a scientific principle parallel to that of inertia. Subjugation and infinite responsibility toward the Other/infinity constrain the finitude within infinity, through which the Self nurtures and defines itself. Thus, after enjoying and satiating myself by "feeding on" the Other (note Lévinas's notion of bodily enjoyment), I should feel gratitude instead of greed.

⁵⁰ The concept that fear (not enough) and avid results to infinite resource become finite is from an African prince's philosophy. See "非洲王子的哲理" ("The Philosophy of the African Prince") from Ajin's blog and "Altruism" from the blog of 長尾山娘 ("Long-tailed mountain lady.")

We can use the concept of the Face to explain why gratitude and greed make two different Self-constructions. Face is the nakedness of the Other, as depicted when Martin describes Sylvia as guileless. In a sense, the Other's fragility stems from its nakedness and guilelessness. Why? Because the Other is totally ignorant of the principle of the Self (rationality); it reasons in a drastically different way. In other words, the Other will never react in any way that I would were I the Other: animals will not revenge humans; they will not trap humans for selling; nature will not punish me if I kill more animals than I need, etc. Non-human beings do not change their nature in response to my cruel treatment of them.⁵¹

Because the Other is absolutely outside of my epistemology, it forces me to confront myself, my own conscience. When I face the Face of the Other, I do not talk to him (because I am unable to) but instead to myself, because the way I choose to treat him reflects how my own consciousness/subjectivity is constructed. In turn, my choice of how I treat the Other further shapes who I am. I can choose to bow to the Other, as Lévinas proposes, no matter what the Other is, or I may wonder about the ways I can *know* him *in my own way*.⁵² In either case, I confront myself. In this crucial moment, I am forced to shape who I am when I decide on the nature of my relationship with the Other.

For example, I can kill a deer to fend for myself, or I can kill a thousand deer to make a fortune. I don't need to take into any consideration the consequence (of the Other) because deer will not change behaviors or try to bring revenge upon me (nor will they reprehend me). The Other's inactivity (from the Self's viewpoint) makes my killing purposeless except to fend for

⁵¹ For example, Robbins describes that hunters used to take advantage of minks, who come out as a group to warm up those dying in the snow, by lying on the snow ground and round up their rescuers.

⁵² Robbins describes how a junior high school student was rewarded with his science project "consisted of cutting the head off a living frog with a pair of scissors, to find out whether frogs swim better with or without their brains" (22). Robbins points out that this youngster learned disrespect animals through the experiment, though the science fair judges disagrees with him. After many examples mentioned, he further claims that "All animals—including those we have been taught to fear—can respond to love and give it" (33). While the book *A Diet for a New America* is entitled thus, it realizes what Lévinas said ethics should come from epistemology.

myself. That is, when the Other puts itself at my disposal—it does not react in any way which I need to take into consideration in order to mend my treatment to the Other. What I confront is not the Other but myself/my own conscience.

To kill a deer to eat has a clear purpose (to sustain myself physically), whereas this purpose does not apply to killing a thousand deer. Therefore, meaning must be imposed in order to carry out the mass killing— a meaning created for justification. The one we are most familiar with is that of commodification, the circle of selling them, earning more money, buying more deer and killing more to sell. This is why Lévinas claims “killing one deer to eat” is enjoyable while “killing one thousand deers” (with its self-imposed purpose) only registers the Self’s cruelty and arrogance. This meaning-making process constitutes a Selfness/epistemology that breeds commodification, competition and fear, rendering the infinite into finite resources.

It must be noted that Lévinas’s ethical theory of face-to-face encounter is based on human relations, according to the main tenets of his works *Totality and Infinity* (1969), and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1998). Lévinas suggests that because animals do not have a face and language like humans, non human Others are excluded from entering into the ethical relations exclusive to humans. In such works, animals are mentioned only as a tool for Lévinas to explain transcendence: how humans should transcend their animality to become real humans. His only short essay about animals is “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights” collected in *Difficult Freedom*. This essay details his encounter with Bobby, the dog who welcomes the rabbles (Jewish captives) to Camp 1492 where they were held as prisoners by the German Nazis “stripped...of...human skin”, where they were “subhuman, a gang of apes” (DF, 153). Bobby however encounters them with face-to-face hospitality. Though they “were beings entrapped in their [Germans] species; despite all their vocabulary, beings without language” (DF, 153), Bobby’s unconditional love restored their humanity. That is, in Bobby’s presence, they were

human again. However, Lévinas seems to have difficulty in granting a reciprocal, unconditional welcome for Bobby (animals) because he soon reduces the dog to a metaphorical symbol.

The fact that animals are excluded from enjoying the same unconditional welcome as humans may qualify Lévinas as a helpful figure in the environmental ethics discourse. Here, however, I second Barbara Jane Davy's argument that one should interpret Lévinas's writing about the Face metaphorically. Davy proposes that, while, for Lévinas, the Other must be a human being, the Other should be given an expansive meaning, that is, one should uphold a "phenomenological understanding of the Other beyond categories such as human, animal, plant, rock, wind, or body of water" (41). In light of this interpretation, Lévinas's theory gains greater purview and can thus prove very insightful and productive vis-à-vis the theory and practice of environmental ethics.

To conclude, Albee's play raises an issue to which Lévinas may provide an affirmative (ethical) answer. Without the Other, the Self will not be the Self. To ensure continuation of the human species, it is important to develop a respectful relationship toward the Other; this is also the best way for humans to access understanding of their essential Selves. The story of the spoons with handles so long that their handlers couldn't use them to reach their mouths illuminates something essential in the Self-Other relationship. Everyone will starve if they try to feed themselves individually with the over-long spoon; but everyone gets fed if they learn to feed one another. The former individual-bound situation creates suffering, whereas the latter brings relief and comfort. Lévinas's affirmation that ethics is the first philosophy applies to today's world, as too often we see that violence breeds violence and that greed brings waste and degradation.

Chapter Four:

Cultural Differences and Epistemology

David Henry Hwang is best known for *M. Butterfly*, a play that ran for two years on Broadway and won the 1988 Tony, Drama Desk, John Gassner, and Outer Critics Circle Awards, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. His *Golden Child* won a 1997 Obie Award for playwriting and subsequently moved to Broadway, where it received three 1998 Tony nominations. His latest play, *Yellow Face*, premiered in 2007 at Los Angeles's Mark Taper Forum and New York's Public Theater. Hwang's other plays include *FOB* (1981 OBIE Award), *The Dance & the Railroad* (1982 Drama Desk Nomination and Pulitzer finalist; CINE Golden Eagle Award), *Family Devotions* (1982 Drama Desk nomination), *The House of Sleeping Beauties* (1983), *The Sound of a Voice* (1983), *Bondage* (1992), *Face Value* (1993), and *Trying to Find Chinatown* (1996). He has also been awarded numerous grants, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Pew Charitable Trusts. In addition, Hwang sits on the boards of the Dramatists Guild, Young Playwrights, Inc., and the Museum of Chinese in the Americas. From 1994-2001, he served by appointment of President Clinton on the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. Such credits confirm the success that Hwang has enjoyed as a dramatist and points to the fascination that his plays have held for audiences across the country. Clearly he has established himself in the first rank of playwrights working today in the American theatre.

In some measure Hwang's rise and reputation can be attributed to changes in American culture witnessed in the 1960s, that is, the civil rights movement and the subsequent recognition and valuation of diversity, and the wider acceptance of multiculturalism. The end of the 20th

century in U.S. history saw a marked rise in attention to minority groups, in all kinds of media imagery and academic discourse, with a greater visibility and importance achieved by women, gays and lesbians, the disabled, and people of color. This surge informed a new consciousness and sensitivity, leading to a society that in various ways attempted to follow concerns of political-correctness. This phenomenon also included an increased attention to the Asian-American experience. With several Asian-related plays, such as *The Dance & the Railroad*, *Trying to Find Chinatown*, *M. Butterfly*, and so on, Hwang took the status as a key dramatist in theatre of ethnicity, as his work helped to illuminate and contribute to an Asian-American history and to construct an Asian-American identity. Such an assessment of Hwang's role and significance is highlighted by Ban Wang (*Professor of Chinese and of comparative literature*), who in his "Reimagining Political Community: Diaspora, Nation-State, and the Struggle for Recognition", points out that "the evocation of the past" in Hwang's plays "remains a viable means by which Chinese Americans may imagine their history through performance and storytelling" (251). Linking Hwang's emergence as an American playwright to the rise of multiculturalism in American culture emphasizes Hwang's work as a vehicle of ethnic consciousness and identity—his success a consequence of his Asian-American lineage and ethnic-inflected drama.⁵³

However, identifying Hwang as an *Asian-American* playwright who has risen to national prominence might be a qualification that Hwang does not like or think appropriate.⁵⁴ On the one hand, winning a Tony Award for Best Play for 1988's *M. Butterfly* brought Hwang accolades and attention, making him a figurehead and spokesperson in Asian-American circles in the

⁵³ While some may define the term "race" differently from "ethnicity", here I use them interchangeably.

⁵⁴ In an interview with Jack Viertel, Hwang said: "I remember being 23 and *FOB* opening at the Public and all of a sudden in certain circles I was considered a role model--the first profile of me ever published in the New York Times had the headline "I Write Plays to Claim a Place for Asian Americans"--which I don't think I even really said, but it just sort of came along with the job" (Viertel).

United States. On the other hand, however, such attention and focus have categorized Hwang's works, marked them as limited to or exclusively concerned with racial issues. Rising as a playwright in the 1980s, when multiculturalism prospered, Hwang discovered that his ethnic background was easily foregrounded. Hwang, however, offers a view of race and ethnicity that challenges facile characterizations. While critics and audiences have frequently assigned him as the leading Asian-American playwright working today, he has endeavored to complicate racial awareness and thinking. Hwang is devoted to contravening the essentialization of the racial imaginary, and in many of his works about race—*M. Butterfly*, *The Bondage*, *Face Value*, *The Yellow Face*—the issue of “authenticity” has been a recurrent motif,⁵⁵ and his plays have forwarded dramatizations of difference that emphasize contingency and relational-thinking (rather than purist identities and insular histories).

Not being content with his racial identification, with his status as an Asian-American dramatist, Hwang has worked to expand such designation. He has taken on work that highlights his writing skills (beyond his position as an Asian-American playwright). Since his success with *Golden Child* in 1996, he has co-written the Disney-produced musical “Aida,” Disney’s “Tarzan,” and numerous other screenplays. Jana J. Monji points out that such works have a twofold function: they allow Hwang the opportunity to relax, to work on something other than race-related plays, without “the additional level of responsibility of representing Asians and Asian Americans.” Such works also serve as a marker of Hwang’s success, “proof that he wasn't boxed into an ethnic niche” (Monji). Despite such opportunity in different media, and despite his efforts in creating work that did not directly reflect his personal experience or background, Hwang did return to Asian-American subject matter; the urge to write an *original* play on his

⁵⁵ Hwang has been criticized by Frank Chin as being inauthentic as a young playwright. But he does not believe there's an idea of authenticity. See “David Henry Hwang Interview.”

past led in 2005 to the composition of the faux-memoir *Yellow Face* (Monji), a work which won him a third Obie Award in playwriting.

The dilemma Hwang has faced is not uncommon for minority writers. First, their work may be evaluated by and promoted for its ethnic aspect; in this instance, questions of tokenism may arise. Such writers also face the problem of categorization—as they advance their work on racial or ethnic themes and issues, the reception and understanding of their work might invoke broad characterizations and essentialist understandings. One may argue that a politics that foregrounds multiculturalism may be commended, for seeking the recognition of pluralism and confronting racial prejudices that have remained active for hundreds of years; one may also detect problems with such a viewpoint, especially as it may risk an essentialized comprehension of different races and cultures. Where racial equality has not been realized, where pluralism has been slow to take hold, it is not likely that equality can be achieved simply by increasing the exposures of diverse cultures. In such cases, representation risks merchandising the essence of a certain group, playing down multiplicities within racial/cultural identities. Since the practices of “representation” are not unproblematic, it should *not* be deemed that simply presenting images of difference in and of themselves boost multiculturalism—a term that connotatively anticipates respect for diversity. Ethel Pitts Walker, a female professor of theatre arts, in her essay “The Dilemma of Multiculturalism in the Theatre,” challenges the practices and applications of “multiculturalism,” which she describes as “presently a hollow cliché, a nomenclature clothing liberals who believe in some vague concept of equality”(10).

In addition, multiculturalism may also be vulnerable to political forces. Joan W. Scott, an American historian who writes on French culture, observes: “If ‘political correctness’ is the label attached to critical attitudes and behavior, ‘multiculturalism’ is the program it is said to be attempting to enact” (13). If this view reveals multiculturalism enrooted in and issuing from

“political correctness,” instead of genuine ethical concern, then focus centers on political positioning and power structures. And it is often the case that multicultural thinking presumes a center/margin dynamic, one that tacitly subordinates minorities. Walker writes: “Theorists generally define multiculturalism from a Western European basis, implying the assimilation of other groups into the base culture” (7). This aspect of multiculturalism then determines the view that “difference” is defined by and accepted through the enforcement of political forces; this outlook does not significantly acknowledge an ethical component—the ethical is relinquished, given over solely to the political arena.

As a driving force of identity politics for decades in America, multiculturalism appeals to the coexistence of difference racial/cultural groups. It reinforces an individual identification with collective attributes, i.e., race, culture, ideology, appearance, etc. Thus defined, identity politics is vulnerable to the accusation that it delimits individuals, reducing them to their appearance and characteristics; that is, it is a system of affirmative action tied to ethnic backgrounds and racial attributes.⁵⁶ Embracing a pluralist framework, one that questions the unified concept of identity, Scott challenges the common application of multiculturalism and argues, “identity is taken as the referential sign of a fixed set of customs, practices, and meanings, an enduring heritage, a readily identifiable sociological category, a set of shared traits and/or experiences” (14). Increased attention to multiculturalism and identity politics has drawn debate and different responses from U.S. political parties. Some political conservatives view any recognition of demographic diversity as a “dangerous orthodoxy”; some of their liberal opponents claim that exposure to diversity will enhance fairness and tolerance (Scott). While those on the left regard their opponents’ view as repressive, their own outlooks are not altogether unproblematic and

⁵⁶“For example, Barack Obama did not run for president on a platform of ethnic recognition in a system of affirmative action but as a cosmopolitan, unracialized intellectual” (“Multiculturalism and Beyond”).

frequently demonstrate a kind of “wishful thinking,” oversimplifying the issues of race and difference.

Competing opinions from the right and left notwithstanding, one major concern of identity politics involves its tendency to generalize and naturalize a racial/cultural collective; identity politics suggests a presumed “authenticity” that draws a given group together as a monolithic whole. Hwang points out this dilemma of identity politics in a 2008 interview: “. . . in the generalization of a collected groups, and analysis only through the lens of power, it fails to attest to individual unique, etc.” (Qtd. in Viertel). Scott confirms the point Hwang sets forth and further argues that the naturalization of identity, by making it a matter of biology or history, assumes that people are “discriminated against *because* they are already different when, in fact, I would argue, it is the other way around: difference and the salience of different identities are produced by discrimination, a process that establishes the superiority or the typicality or the universality of some in terms of the inferiority or atypicality or particularity of others” (14-15).

The problematic aspects of identity politics have drawn scholarly attention and critique. In *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading*, Rey Chow argues that “contemporary multiculturalism risks fascism in its positive imagining of ethnic others” (Qtd. in Parikh 318), as it craves to generalize and idealize oppressed minority groups. Chow suggests that “idealism has been the primary mode through which cultural studies has attempted to establish a form of resistance theory, it is also this idealism by which the ‘other’ can say or do anything in the current climate without being considered wrong”.⁵⁷ Chow goes so far as to suggest, in the

⁵⁷ In the introduction to her collection of essays, *Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading*, Rey Chow describes a particularly angry and telling response she encountered to her argument in this book that contemporary multiculturalism risks fascism in its positive imagining of ethnic others: “‘Only she could write something like this,’ some readers charged, meaning, I suppose, that only a ‘woman of color’ and therefore a double minority, could possibly mount a criticism of multiculturalism as such without getting into trouble, without being labeled ‘racist’” (xxii).

contentious chapter titled “The Fascist Longings in Our Midst,” which analyzes the fundamental mechanisms of fascism, that “the positivistic desire that motivates the brutalities of organized, historical fascism is also at work in the liberal, multicultural celebration of Third World peoples” (Qtd. in Parikh 319). Such criticism highlights how liberal viewpoints, regardless of how well-intentioned they may be, can activate dynamics that obscure aspects of difference and serve their own agendas.

At the core of any fascistic enterprise is the element of domination, an exertion of violence that is often abetted by appeals to rationality. Chow’s critique of identity politics and its multicultural advocacy casts aspersion on those in positions of privilege, those who form a consensus and wield a politically-correct discourses, which themselves may exert a violence in a self-justifying manner. In short, this outlook, which subordinates the individual and particular to the provenance of the group, may practice a kind of totalitarianism.

The dynamic of totalization stands of one of the crucial features of Western culture according to the thinking of Emmanuel Lévinas. The impulse toward totalization, for Lévinas, is evident in both Western philosophy and politics, aspects of a fundamental Western rationality. In much of Western politics there is a fear of difference and conflict; as Lévinas points out: “the Hobbesian claim that the peaceful order of society is constituted in opposition to the threat of the war of *all against all*” (emphasis mine; TI, 161). For Lévinas, “domination of the category of totality in Western philosophy is linked to the domination of totalizing forms of politics—ultimately, Nationalism and Stalinism—and the complete reduction of the ethical to the political”(TI, 161). The unusual proposal of Lévinas’s philosophy involves the prioritization of the ethical over the political (at least before the political). For Lévinas, the fundamental relationship is an ethical one, between the Self and the Other. This relationship demands a responsibility for the Other, without knowledge of the Other. Hence, Lévinas prioritizes ethics

over any ontological rational reduction, that ultimately leads to politics (the realm of government, jurisprudence and partisan power).

Lévinas's insights can prove illuminating and helpful when exploring issues of identity politics (and by extension in analyzing the plays of Henry David Hwang). Indeed, Lévinas's notion of ethics—the relation between Self and Other—provides a helpful perspective when considering the advantages and drawbacks of identity politics and the sort of impasse it has come to inhabit. Defying the prioritization of rationality in Western philosophy, Lévinas proposes an ethics that is not dominated by a human-centered standpoint. Ethics does not involve issues of rights, legal claims, or group-belonging—it rather indicates a relation of obligation.

Indeed, Lévinas is “useful” if one holds that identity politics has revealed evidence of exhausting itself. In an interview, literary critic and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that she has been “deeply troubled by identity politics” (Yan 430) because people get to know other parts of the world through a cartographic position instead of a face-to-face encounter. Other scholars have also expressed some concern with identity politics. Political theorist Lawrie Balfour elaborates on the danger of essentialization in his “Reparations after Identity Politics,” indicating that identity politics risks enshrining a view of minority as victims “whose moral authority is not subject to discussion or critique” (788). Insofar as politics hinges on guilt over those repressed in the past, identity politics invites the charge of divisiveness and engages in “the kind of shoring up of borders, internal and external, that produces new exclusions” (Balfour 788). This impasse identity politics faces today registers an urgent of a new set of ethics.

Given this compromised position of identity politics, Lévinas's theories of ethics offer alternative understandings and insights for the negotiation of difference. Emphasizing the importance of ethics and Self-Other relations, Lévinas asserts that identity alone does not account for human subjectivity. Identity politics, taking Lévinas's cue, would appear to

overvalue the economy of interiority of subjectivity, thereby diminishing the significance of relations between interiority and exteriority. For Lévinas, the ethical is prior to any identity position; it appears as a relation and not as an attribute or identifying quality.

As Hwang strives to illustrate the dilemma of identity politics (mostly through his depiction of racial issues), one finds that Lévinas can be brought into a productive conversation with Hwang and his work. A number of Lévinas's concepts prove helpful in analyzing Hwang's dramas, including Lévinas's understanding of time and the Other, his take on ontology and epistemology, and, of course, his prioritization of ethics as the First Philosophy. In sum, Lévinas advocates what has been termed "The Wisdom of Love," and this concept proves very useful and illuminating when analyzing Hwang's writing, especially his ideas on race, ethnic difference, and multicultural encounter.

In his recent work, *The Yellow Face* (2007), a faux-memoir, Hwang addresses and challenges the tendency to denote "race" as differentiation maker, one that sustains a monolithic community in a globalized world. While he has himself served as a spokesperson for Asian Americans since *M. Butterfly*, he had not openly explored or fully questioned identity politics until this work. Though the success of *M. Butterfly* in the 1980s effectively served to shore up the call to political correctness and was used to advocate for multiculturalism and identity politics, Hwang did give some evidence of hesitation. In his 1984 work, *The Sound of a Voice*, Hwang exposed a problematic epistemological Self-Other encounter in the play, a problem embodied in romantic love. This early work did not confront identity politics in a straightforward way; however, the issues and relations that Hwang explored in this piece indicate a sort of foreshadowing, as the questions this work poses serve well to contextualize the questions he later raises about identity politics in *The Yellow Face*.

The first part of this chapter proceeds through two basic movements. The first explores Hwang's understanding of Western epistemological models, as implied in *The Sound of a Voice*. The second uses Lévinas's analysis of time to account for the differences between West and East, that is, a Western Self and an Eastern (i.e., non-Western) Other—the two indicating conflicting epistemological models. Gendering these oppositional epistemological models, Hwang has a man represent the Western, dominant and progressive historical view, given to a linear viewpoint of time; he uses a woman to represent an alternative view—the Eastern, subjective, given to a non-linear viewpoint of time. As the play unfolds its tragic love story, it demonstrates how different epistemologies should seek interaction, to effect a co-existence, as opposed to a binary hostility. Advancing what Lévinas calls “the wisdom of love,” the play critiques the man's pursuit of “light,” which indicates a “love of wisdom,” an outlook equated with traditional philosophy. Moreover, the manner in which the man experiences the Other (the woman) as something he must subsume and make surrender, highlights the violence inherent in traditional Western epistemology. In short, in this play Hwang explores alternatives to Western rationalism and the impulse to totalize.

While *Sound of a Voice* is not Hwang's typical “race play,” it is a key play in tracing the trajectory of Hwang's dramatic vision and thinking on matters of racial identity. Given the work's suspicion of the traditional Western epistemological model, upon which much of the understanding of race pivots, the play stands as a precursor to his later work, which more directly confronts issues of identity politics. The following analysis of *Sound of a Voice* thus functions as a point of entry for the chapter's later discussion of the more mature and more acclaimed play, *Yellow Face*, which foregrounds racial identity as a guiding theme. In both works, one notes a suspicion of traditional epistemology, and, despite however well-intentioned that identity politics might be—in pursuing social equality—the fact that such a politics remains committed to a kind

of traditional epistemology signals a potential hazard (one that the work of Lévinas exposes and challenges). Following discussion of *The Sound of a Voice*, the second half of this chapter will direct its attention to Hwang's play *Yellow Face* and will further investigate questions of identity and ethical relations.

The Wisdom of Love: The Interplay of Mythos and Logos in *The Sound of a Voice*

Emphasizing continental philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas's insistence on respect for difference and obligation to abject Others, scholar Silvia Benso reverses the conventional attitude of philosophy—"the love of wisdom"—and instead asserts "the wisdom of love." The traditional notion emphasizes the love of knowledge/truth and encourages the consumption of the Other through an uncompromising rationality. As a consequence, this outlook generates a strict dichotomy between "self" and "non-self" (i.e., the Other). Benso reconfigures the fundamental aspects of the Self-Other relationship in terms of logos and mythos—the logical and non-logical accounts of reality respectively. Benso argues for "...a mutually regulated interplay of mythos and logos as a way to regain a sense of wisdom that remains respectful of the elements of otherness...[this interplay] results into a mytho-logy in which the logos [is] directing the mythos..." (117). In other words, the Other's otherness should not be cordoned off from the Symbolic order, i.e., language, but should be respected, warranted and sustained in the Self's realm through politics/and institutions. In view of Hwang's play *The Sound of a Voice*, this reconciliation of the Self-Other relationship is embodied in the romance between a Japanese Samurai (Man, sword) and Hanako (Woman, flowers), the woman he loves. In his dramatization of their relationship, Hwang provokes consideration of broader matters of intimacy, outreach, and being-in-the-world with Others.

The Sound of a Voice retells a love entanglement set in ancient Japan. It is almost a universal love story, with both characters yearning to hear another voice in order to assuage their

loneliness. They, however, find themselves catapulted into collision, as their intimacy reveals different worlds in operation. This collision is not only reminiscent of many romantic relationships, it also suggests two different epistemological models embedded in gender relationships. Hurrying along with his sword on an indeterminate journey, the Samurai embodies a dominating, *apocalyptic* sense of linear (temporal) progress and urgency. He can only fall asleep amidst the sounds of a city, and he needs consistent practice in sword play so as to maintain his sense of control. For him, all things inscribe their existence on the longitudes and latitudes of time. Through this rational lens the world logically coheres among a motley collection of events and things. He upholds a rational epistemological model and a logical account of reality. His stance and outlook effectively demonstrate Plato's attitude toward myths at the dawn of Western civilization and philosophy. His vision also registers the woman as an unfamiliar entity in need of pinning down, of fixing within an orderly frame. His Samurai journey may in fact be understood as his attempt to subsume the woman within his epistemological field, to bring her into his knowledge.

For the man in this play, the world operates in terms of either victory or defeat. Hwang invests the first half of the play with romantic exuberance. This aspect is important because the man is high-spirited only when events play out in a dominating, *apocalyptic* and linear way—reflecting a bellicose nature in matters of daily life. In scene three, the man helps the woman chop wood: “I enjoy it, you know. Chopping wood. It’s clean. No questions. You take your ax, you stand up the log, you aim—pow!—you either hit it or you don’t. Success or failure”(159). In scene five, he again helps her by scrubbing away the stubborn floor stain with “a little rhythm” (163). His joyful shout upon the removal of the stain conveys something significant about his perception of their romantic relationship.

MAN. I didn't think I could do it. . . but there—it's gone—I did it!

WOMAN. Yes. You did.

MAN. And you—you were great.

WOMAN. No—I just watched.

MAN. We were a team! You and me!

(Man grabs Woman. Pause) (Hwang 163)

Over something as trivial as scrubbing the floor, the man gives over his affection for the woman. More specifically, this is a moment where their differences are reconciled, as they join to fight off a common “enemy.” Only when she is secured as “part of him”—meaning, she is playing the appropriate role in his social expectations—can he develop romantic feelings toward her.

As a warrior, the man girds his sword at all times. When first led into the woman's house, he keeps his hands on the hilt in a watchful manner, before the woman invites him to join her at tea. He has come to the woman's dwelling with a purpose—sent by the “outside world” (the village), where it is rumored that the woman is a witch. This purpose not only represents the masculine/logical and conquering spirit, but also signifies his craving for control and his apprehension over being devoured by the mythical Other. He never appears on stage without a prop with him. The axe and scrubber serve as supplements to the sword, functioning as means to control and fight off the enemy. Ironically while both the axe and scrubber are designed to have their own “enemies,” the sword's only enemy, as the play's action will show, is a fly. In scene seven, the Samurai is gleeful over his victorious achievement of chopping a fly in two—so much so that he insists on giving her some “pointers” (166) on swordsmanship. At the height of his pride, he, however, soon experiences defeat, and the subsequent rout will tarnish his career as a warrior. With the dramatic tensions now heightened, the story takes on a chilling and tragic tone.

Among the primary issues of this play is that of time, and how different measurements of time hinder the romance between Hanako and the Samurai. In this instance, Lévinas's alternative notion of time can help to illuminate the play's text and its theatrical performance, as the epistemological model of Lévinas suggests a view of time that marks the burgeoning of a contemplation of the Other (which will later inform his theory of alterity).

Traditional Western epistemology has subsumed time via a human-centered perspective and rationale. However, for Lévinas, this ontological comprehension of time is problematic. It entails a forced logic indicative of a linear movement of time throughout history. The fact that "now" both passes and comes along in the same moment is itself contradictory. This paradox proves that such an understanding of time is framed within a subjective perception of reality, with time existing solely for its own end.

In a linear movement of time, "the present encroaches upon the future" (Lévinas EE, 95). Lévinas defines Now as the virile ego and denotes Future as an unknown Other. In a linear perception of time, however, as Future automatically flows into Now, it loses its alterity; an understanding exists solely for the Self's end. In that tradition, Now consumes Future, and perpetually triumphs over Future, as Self triumphs over the Other. The subject, in this epistemological model, remains enclosed in "an instant," imagining itself progressing into the future. However, for Lévinas, the Self is merely entrapped in cyclical instants.

In that instant, it "constitutes its own object" and produces "its own interior for signs of its conformity with being" (Lévinas MHO, 12). "I" circulates across instants, linking a series of coming Nows, which are termed as Future (Lévinas EE, 95). In other words, the rationality forming a subject's epistemology registers only a dialogue between Self and its soul. For Lévinas, this ontological understanding of time informs the Self's "long tradition of pride, heroism, domination and cruelty" (TTO, 103). Lévinas later connects time "to the alterity of the other

person, and progressively radicaliz[es] the sense of the Other's alterity" (Lévinas TOAE, 6). He claims in *Existence and Existents*: "the dialectic of time is the very dialectic of the relationship with the other, that is, a dialogue which in turn has to be studied in terms of other than those of the dialectic of the solitary subject" (96).⁵⁸

The relationship between Now and Future, Self and the Other, Lévinas proposes, should be perceived within an ethical relationship instead of an ontological one. That is, Future is not an instant that will automatically become Now, but is instead an absolute Other that can only be reached through a transcendence of subjectivity. Future only comes about when the Self breaks its solitude and engages with an alterity coming only from the Other.⁵⁹ Hence the Self should bow to the Other because only through subjugating itself to the Other can Self construct its own subjectivity. Alterity of the Other cannot be understood in ontological terms, but in ethical terms.⁶⁰

In *The Sound of a Voice* Hwang presents two understandings of time: the man's ontological terms of time (the cyclical instants) and the woman's ethical terms of time (Time only exists when the Other comes). Hwang sets *The Sound of a Voice* in an indeterminate time frame, with the transition between scenes coming as a rotation of night and day. While bemused by the

⁵⁸As Lévinas states in his short essay, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology": "the subject itself will constitute its own object" (12). He presents a cautious warning about subjective being enclosed within "its own interior for signs of its conformity with being...[because from] there, it is but a step to idealism" (12). This dialogue between "self and its soul" is dangerous in the sense that it situates itself within the chain of signification and imagines its own transcendental signifier (i.e., God) to justify or even glorify its own violence toward the Other. Moreover, in "Is Ontology Fundamental?" (Lévinas BPW, 9), Lévinas claims that because a being only exists when it comes into my comprehension (when it is enlightened), "I" do not invoke it, but instead name it and possess it. That "possession is the mode whereby a being, while existing, is partially denied", indicating such a being is under my power. This being is also no means or tool of mine, but an end in and of itself because it offers itself to me. Lévinas argues that even if the being is dominated by me, I do not possess it.

⁵⁹The Other can be demonstrated through death. Death is not the end of subjectivity, but signifies an unknown realm outside epistemology that constructs subjectivity. In other words, unknowability and absolute alterity characterize Death and/as Future. Lévinas claims: "Death is never now" (Lévinas TI, 72) because the instant of now is subjectivity's realm. When Death comes, the subject loses its reign and is no longer itself.

⁶⁰Lévinas holds that the subject should not only subjugate itself to the holy Other, but further held as a hostage. We never know what death is, or what future will bring, hence we can only be passively subsumed into it, becoming part of it. It is something that reverses the subject from active to passive. While "the now is the fact that I am master, master of the possible, of grasping the possible", death is "the end of virility" (Lévinas TI, 73).

woman's temporal cognition, the man defines time as an antagonistic relationship.

Characterizing life as a state in constant mobility, he notes: "Traveling is a matter of timing. Catching the light" (158). Like a predator, the man hounds the daylight like his sword hunts an enemy, riving the world according to the dualism of Self and Other. The woman, however, views time differently and with an alternative reality. Their divergent models of epistemology can be well demonstrated through their conversation about flowers in scene two:

MAN. You must have received these [flowers] very recently. I would guess—
within five days.

WOMAN. I don't know. But I wouldn't trust your estimate. It's all in the amount
of care you show to them. I create a world which is outside the realm of what you
know.

MAN. What do you do?

WOMAN. I can't explain. Words are too inefficient. It takes hundreds of words to
describe a single act of caring. With hundreds of acts, words become irrelevant. . .
(159)

The woman's disbelief in the man's estimation suggests that the flowers have lasted longer than five days, since she puts so much effort into caring them. For the man, it is only natural that flowers blossom at a certain point of time, just as they shrivel up and die at another. So he estimates that the fresh flowers must have appeared within the past five days. For him, it is nothing but a matter of time, instead of a matter of care. However, the flower he pilfers in scene one shrivels up later in scene four (because he does not know how to take care of it), implying that care is "outside of the realm he knows." Flowers are not something he can control, at least not with his sword (which connotes the ontological understand of linear time). This revelation later sparks within him an inner fear, especially when this anxiety is aggravated by the rumors—

the mythical accounts of the woman as witch and how he will be trapped in the never-dying flowers—told to him by the villagers.

In my February 2009 production (Hatcher Hall Theatre, Louisiana State University) of the piece, I called for a vase of flowers to be placed in the center of the stage during the half-hour pre-show; it was my intent for the flowers/prop to serve as a guiding symbol, conveying the core emotion of the play and bringing the audience into Hanako's entropic reality. The prop helped reveal the man as an intruder, implicitly identifying the performance setting as the woman's territory. As an extension of the woman, the flowers then took on in a symbolic way her passion and loneliness.

In Hwang's play, the woman (Hanako) appears to be illogical and mythical in terms of time and its passage. She tells the Samurai: "I lose track [of time]. . . I don't consider time when there is no voice in the air. It's pointless. Time begins with the entrance of a visitor, and ends with his exit" (156). In her outlook, time itself is cyclical, [MAN: The light? WOMAN: It will return. (159)]. Unlike the man, she does not "catch the light" so that her flowers might bloom. Time is never experienced in competitive terms, and she does not cry out for "advancement." The Present does not consume the Future in her reality. Time only seems evident when a stranger/visitor comes in for her to care for. Her account of reality is reminiscent of Lévinas's characterization of time—time only exists when the Other enters her world and she becomes subject to it. It is "the amount of care" that she puts into the Other (flowers/ visitors), instead of her exquisite control of the sword. By subjugating herself to the Other—in this case the romantic relationship—she is able to transcend the "instant" characterized by recurrence of "the same."⁶¹

⁶¹ It refers to the recurrent instants, but can expand to Lévinas's usage of this term. Peperzak points out that in *Totality and Infinity*, Lévinas uses The Same to characterize "the whole of Western philosophy, whereas 'the infinite' indicates the transcendence suppressed by that same tradition." The Same "concretizes itself in the behavior of a monopolistic ego and the totality of Greek and European philosophy" (120). What is significant, however, is that Lévinas does not "fall into the trap of a contrary opposition" because "without any sameness...only the dispersion of

In other words, it is not time per se but her relationship with the Other that determines the nature of time and constructs her subjectivity. In short, she demonstrates an existence outside of linear time and suggests a different way of understanding Self and Other.

In my production, the vase of flowers was the only one prop on the minimalist stage. I marked the space as the woman's domain. The location of the vase shifted as the scenes progressed. At times it was set on a shelf, serving only as a house decoration. At other times (as in scene two where the above conversation takes place) it occupied center stage, symbolizing the relationship the woman decides to nurture. By a metonymic process, one that advanced with the rising dramatic tension, the vase of flowers became an indicator of the play's gender relationship as well as an image of the daunting and mystical Other.

Fraught with suspicion of Hanako's mythical existence (and the rumored imprisonment of visitors), the Samurai hesitates to respond to Hanako's passion. Their encounter exemplifies the kind of Self-Other relationship Lévinas condemns—one that emphasizes logic and progress while reducing the Other to a mythical existence. This dynamic is best demonstrated when the man is defeated by the woman. Amazed by the woman's technique, the bitter man begins to recount the rumors circulated about the woman throughout the village. He also affirms these stories by confessing that he senses that the woman's face has changed since he first saw her. On the other hand, fostering the relationship with meticulous care, the woman nonetheless is afraid of what her superior technique (of swordplay) might bring about.

WOMAN. All visitors do [leave]. I know. I've met many. . . There are
boundaries outside of

an extreme atomism would remain, which would be the end of all philosophy and thought in general" (130-131). What's crucial is the ethical relationship between the same and the irreducible Other. In terms of time, The Same denotes how a being is entrapped in the recurrent instant. See Peperzak's *The Quest of Meaning*.

which visitors do not want to see me step. Only who knows what those boundaries are? Not I. They change with every visitor. You have to be careful not to cross them, but you never know where they are. And one day. . . you step outside the lines. The visitor knows. You don't. You didn't know that you'd done anything different. You thought it was just another part of you. The visitor sneaks away. The next day, you learn that you had stepped outside his heart. . . (168)

What provokes an even deeper fear in the Samurai is his awareness that he might become like the flowers. Because he cannot understand the woman through “words” (i.e., language), he views her through the epistemological lens that is available to him, that is, the way of looking at the world provided by his training as a warrior. More specifically, he imagines the woman as another mysterious warrior with a (different kind of) sword. This fear grows greater until he loses his confidence when defeated. From that point on, he imagines a human inside the petals of flowers [MAN. . .It hums. It hums with the peacefulness of one who is completely imprisoned. (169)]. In this way of understanding, he regards the woman's care no longer as a signifier of the tenderness between the lovers but as the scythe of a reaper.

MAN. I came here with a purpose. The world was clear. You changed the shape of your face, the shape of my heart—rearranged everything—created a world where I could do nothing. (174)

The basic story of *The Sound of a Voice* is a simple one; the travelling warrior comes into the space of the woman and encounters a challenge, one involving love and conquest. In short, how can he be in a loving relation with Hanako and still retain his status and world-view as a samurai? Entering her world also demands commitment to a new order of time—how can the warrior react and respond?

The struggle and interaction of the play is effectively conveyed through the play's key properties. While the sword represents the rigid order of linear time and its concomitant ideology (i.e., Symbolic Order—the language), the lexicon of the “floral language” proves to be somewhat more complicated. Chiefly associated with the woman, the flowers, are definitely not limited to a singular symbolic meaning. As the play unfolds, the characters quickly take on the masks of mysterious beings, functioning to subvert linear time and sheer causality. The romantic dimension colors the relationship between the Samurai and the woman. As the man struggles with the romantic love and his mission as a warrior, the flowers act in a multivalent way—they are passive, enervated, and prone to victimization from the man's epistemological lens; on the other hand they serve as a formidable penitentiary that imprisons the once-virile warrior.

At the end the play concludes tragically, and the love between the characters does not come to fruition. The warrior appears finally disheartened and dispirited, as though effectively castrated and divested of power. He steps into the space of the woman and sees her dangling feet beneath a curtain. She is revealed hanging. This conclusion indicates that the interaction between the two modes of existence or frames of understanding have found no synthesis. On one level, it can be thought that the woman has been killed by the warrior's world order, by his epistemological context. The closing image of the play highlights an empty vase, the flowers vacated, indicating both the absence of the woman's body and “woman's time” in history.

The Sound of a Voice achieves strong dramatic effect through a simple love story; however, the confrontation between the warrior and the woman draws powerful and psychological and relational conflicts into play. In terms of Self-Other relationships, this ending reveals that the woman/Other suffers from categorization, from being forced under the labels that the man/Self tries to impose on her. As he seeks to gain power over her, the man shows himself susceptible to the superstitious “stories,” trumped up by the outside villagers, tales that tell of the woman as

witch imprisoning her visitors. His reaction to these stories and his consequent attempts to wield power poignantly demonstrate a dynamic of domination in this instance of how the Self treats the Other.

In the man's world, romantic affection can only occur when the Other takes on a submissive stance, when the lover caters to him, i.e., the Self. Romantic love is thus conditional. Moreover, the lover can be made into a scapegoat, punished on account of Self's fear of being enervated and rendered effeminate. Romantic feelings only happen when the Self feels good about itself or, in this case, feels secure within its own territory. Romantic love represents the Self-Other relationship in a powerful and fundamental way, in that it most effectively registers humanity's paradox of being—a condition perpetually caught between a perpetual craving for the Other and its own fear of self-diminishment, of the blurring the of boundaries between subjectivity and the Other.

The fundamental epistemological model of Self-Other can be identified at the core of romance. What is more, the human Self replicates this same model in its treatments of racial Others, animal-others, etc. If the practice of any kind of tenderness, or any love or altruism depends upon the “sure” Self, one confident of boundaries and self-empowerment, what does this mean for human interactions—for justice, charity, sympathy, morality, and so on? In short, does love only come after the assertion of the Self has been secured? That this understanding might be held as true and right keenly worried Lévinas, who claimed that ethics should be the First Philosophy, that obligation and responsibility should precede the Self in its particular situation, in its particular identity.

One can see how aspects of Lévinas's outlook come into play in Hwang's work. The way in which *The Sound of a Voice* conveys different understandings of time echoes Lévinas's reflections on a non-linear, non-sequential time, and how different models of time privilege

different understandings of the Self and Other. Certainly the emphasis Hwang gives to the Self-Other relation in the love story of the play evidences his fascination with alternative ways of understanding the Self and Other, his fascination with exploring the wisdom of love. Indeed, the origins of the story between the warrior and the woman indicate religious aspects. Considering that the Japanese Ikebana (the way of flowers) originates from a religious tribute to Buddha, the tangled relationship between sword and flowers reflects the story of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment—an epiphany when he successfully transforms swords into flowers.⁶² Hwang's fascination with this story indicates his openness to other modes of conception, to challenging and expanding the Western preoccupation with rationality and knowledge.

This image of transforming swords into flowers points to Lévinas's insights and the pursuit of the wisdom of love. As the image holds oppositions in a kind of unification, it also corresponds to Benso's suggested modality of Self and Other, as inspired by both Plato and Lévinas.⁶³ Being aware of rationality's rigidity, with its tendency to sublimate opposite terms, Benso encourages faithfulness to the ambiguity of reality (123). In *The Wisdom of Love, Or: Negotiating Mythos and Logos with Plato and Lévinas*, she carefully averts the traditional

⁶² As Mara (the evil god of change and death) bars him from his quest, Shakyamuni Buddha transforms the shooting arrows and swords into flowers. This moment demonstrates Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, and also implies a new envisioning of a harmonious Self-Other symbiosis. In her book, *When Things Fall Apart*, Pema Chodron interprets this as a matter concerning the perception of reality. "What may appear to be an arrow or a sword we can actually experience as a flower" (65). Thus, while the gnawing confusion of reality hurls spears and swords toward us, staunch belief in exercising reason is where humanity's happiness is enshrined. So it is not surprising that philosophy becomes "the love of wisdom." Here, subsumption of everything into the spectrum of human knowledge can consign us to security and happiness. However, for Chodron, it is the shunning of reality that causes eternal suffering.

⁶³ The war logos (the mortals) waged on mythos (the immortals) can be dated back to Plato. Originally, both mythos and logos play their compromising, if not distinctly equivalent, roles as the ways to approach the world. However, Plato challenges the oral culture which privileges images over rationalized written form, and subjugates the narrative of mythologies toward an educational end. The unverifiable discourse of mythos then becomes a narrative one that must be guided by verifiable discourse—an argumentative discourse led by logos. In *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology*, Luc Brisson compares "mythos/logos" to "unverifiable discourse/ verifiable discourse" and suggests that the latter term, namely "logos" and "verifiable discourse" of each, contrarily falls in the realm of philosophy. In this process, mythical discourse is not effaced. Instead, it transits from a dominating role to a subordinating role. Philosophy, then, becomes the love of wisdom, negating the original validity of mythological/imaginative narrative accounts.

opposition between mythos and logos and instead proposes a negotiated version of interplay between them. Predomination on either side is dangerous. She further remarks: "...mere myths are self-centered." (123); "Philosophy reveals not the essence of reality, but the canvas, the fabric, the relations of which reality is made... (122). Both mythos and logos interweave and work to create what we know as reality, and both should operate as counterpoint against the potential dictatorship of one or the Other.

The Sound of a Voice thus stands as an early play in Hwang's career which reveals the playwright's concern with forms of knowing, with categories of relation, with different ways of understanding the interplay of Self and Other. The play's suspicion of an over-emphasis on rationality, on the warrior's mode of knowing and the impositions it brings to the Other, foreshadows and helps illuminate his later work, and his later concern with the dynamics of labeling and viewing human relations in terms of rationalist modes and rigid identifications.

The Yellow Face

Highlighting the motif of "authenticity," Hwang's race plays, notably *M. Butterfly*, *The Bondage*, and *Trying to Find Chinatown*, can be seen as an investigation in racial identification and a challenge to common modes of naming and categorization—the plays challenge traditional understanding and the emphasis on "the love of wisdom." Presupposing the essence of a certain group and naturalizing what binds that group, be it blood, attribute, customary behavior, culture, etc., invites challenge by Hwang. He regards such a viewpoint with skepticism and looks with suspicion upon "authenticity," which indicates "the love of wisdom" (anthropology) and the worship of knowledge. But both Hwang and Lévinas question this rationalist mode of marking and sorting the world. In short both are concerned with what falls under the umbrella of "knowledge/philosophy" and what falls beyond.

In *Sound of a Voice* Hwang reveals that essentializing the Other is a means to turn the Other into an “object of knowing.” This assertion of knowledge, which then becomes “authentic truth,” serves to inform and organize the reality we experience every day. Under such an epistemological lens, woman’s existence is deemed problematic and intolerable (which leads to the anxiety and destabilization for the warrior). Lévinas’s theories demonstrate that it is through this violent subjugation of the Other, through this essentialization, that the inner reality of the Self is completed and secured. In other words, essentialization is a project carried out by Western epistemology; such an outlook implies a totalitarian politics that tends to know Others only through an epistemological prism, one that fails/refuses to recognize the Other’s alterity and uniqueness.

Such ways of thinking play a crucial role in how one understands multiculturalism and identity politics. Many of Hwang’s race plays can in effect be seen as a challenge to and a critique of this way of thinking. In having his characters constrained and afflicted by such an epistemological model, one characterized by the subsumption of the Other into the Western realm of knowledge,⁶⁴ Hwang questions not only the “authenticity” of the empowered Self but also the supposed essence of the disempowered racial Other. By declaring “[as] our nation becomes increasingly diverse, traditional definitions of race become blurred, and, in the ideal world, we will choose our own identities” (Qtd. in Lee rev. of *Tokens?* 666), Hwang not only urges a harmonious symbiosis of people bracketed in multivalent racial categories, but ultimately envisages a world where such categories lose their linguistic and cultural potency. Lévinas’s notion of philosophy as “the wisdom of love” then helps to contextualize Hwang’s effort in destabilizing a fixed imagination of racial relations and the treatment it condones.

⁶⁴ See Edward Said’s *Orientalism*.

This ideal and approach embodied in his questioning “what is Asian American,” illuminates Hwang’s cultural status and position. In the United States, Asian Americans seem to inhabit an ambiguous space in America’s racial knowing. In “The State and Subject of Asian American Criticism: Psychoanalysis, Transnational Discourse, and Democratic Ideals,” David Leiwei Li attributes the exclusion of Asian American citizenship to the constitution of the nationality:

“...an American universal of abstract citizenship is historically embodied in the particulars of a European morphology, whether it is in the form of the national image, its proper genealogy, or institutional and cultural legitimacy. The dominant particular is presented as an inclusive universal but translated historically and materially as a practice of excluding other particulars. In this historical imaginary of the American democratic vista, the Asian American is that which exists without a proper name and an appropriate contour” (282).

This passage indicates the Self-Other relationship Hwang suggests in *The Sound of Voice*, wherein the Other is instilled within the Self’s knowledge. The imagination of the American nationality is hinged on a totalitarian outlook, fixing the Other and excluding the Other to complete its own subjectivity. In short, the West uses the East to assure its own cohesion.

Case in point is *M. Butterfly*, an avatar of Orientalist fantasy played out in political, racial and gender contexts. The process of subjecting/falling in love with Song, a cross-dressing Chinese opera singer, enables the French diplomat to envisage and maintain his unified, coherent view of reality. That is, the racial/sexual/political Other is subjugated in his knowledge, a frame which he maintains under his control. The play ends, as is well known, with Gallimard finding out his that his logic has gone topsy-turvy--Song is a male spy who comes to him with a political purpose. *M. Butterfly* thus well demonstrates Hwang’s concern with Western knowing and with the ambiguous and constraining categories given to the Asian-Other.

Hwang’s career exhibits the writer’s continued concern with this topic, though he complicates his thinking on identity. His 1992 play *Bondage* “explores human identity but moves away from the playwright's earlier concerns about immigrant cultural integrity and toward

questions about the validity of ethnic identities in general” (“Bondage”) This play is set in a parlor where an unidentified dominatrix named Terrie role- plays with her client, Mark; in various scenarios he encounters different ethnic Others. The interactions between the client and the costumed Others highlights the display of prejudiced racial attributes. Each new scenario allows the audience to witness the arbitrariness of stereotypical racial impressions: “blondes as bimbos, Asians as geeks, and African Americans as sexual beasts exist only in the realm of pretend” (“Bondage”). The play dramatizes the detrimental effects of such thinking, and the impediment that such racial attitudes set before person to person intimacy. Here Mark and the dominatrix can only come into a kind of communication once the costumes have been stripped away, each identity divested (indicating the artificiality of costume and stereotype).

The issue of “authenticity” is further addressed in Hwang’s 1996 play, *Trying to Find Chinatown*, where the images of racial identity collapse and reform in mixed fashion. Ronnie, an Asian American, is offended by Benjamin, a Caucasian adoptee of an Asian-American family, when the latter presupposes that Ronnie automatically knows where Chinatown is because of his appearance. The authenticity issue is re-contextualized and complicated through biological and adoptive connections, which highlight the fluid and changeable use of the term “race.” What Hwang intends is a rethinking of race and an acknowledgement of its many complications. Writing in her review of *Tokens?: The NYC Asian American Experience on Stage*, Josephine Lee corroborates Hwang’s outlook: “even seemingly obsolete notions of race are barely ‘blurred,’ never mind ‘dead.’ Instead such racisms are continually resurrected in ever more complicated ways” (666).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Also, in *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*, Dorinne Kondo mentions that “Hwang tells of a white woman in the audience who proclaimed her shock that Asian Americans were raising issues of racism (1994). She clearly viewed Asian Americans as model minorities, assuming that racism for us is no longer an issue. Her anger/guilt/doubt/surprise may have been shared by many members of the audience” (236).

Though considered something of a failure, Hwang's 1993 play *Face Value* (which he would rework into his 2007 play *Yellow Face*) highlights another dynamic of racial thinking.

Advancing the view that race is a mask, that it is to some extent performative, *Face Value* stands as a satire of the *Miss Saigon* controversy of 1991.⁶⁶ As Hwang's second Broadway work, *Face Value* also covers material that is similar to that of his previous race plays. Like *Bondage* and *Trying to Find Chinatown*, *Face Value* also problematizes the notion of authenticity, here through a farcical situation of mistaken racial identities: two Asian-American actors dressed in whiteface plan to interrupt a show featuring a Caucasian actor dressed in yellowface. The farcical situation ends with an array of couples paired with partners of another race.

Unfortunately, *Face Value* closed before it would have officially opened in 1993, as a consequence of "audience reaction, poor box-office performance, and the artistic and production team's assessments" (Kondo 235). Despite the play's lack of success, anthropology and American studies professor Dorinne K. Kondo points out that "[a] complex politics of reception was at work during the production of the play" and that the "chilly reception" the play received indicated that "Hwang had touched a nerve about race"⁶⁷ (235-36).

Kondo's observation about Hwang's touching a nerve with *Face Value* points to the fact that racial concerns of Asian American groups have not died down but have become more complicated and problematic. Most of Hwang's racial works until this point—*M. Butterfly*,

⁶⁶ The controversy began with the casting of Jonathan Pryce, a white actor, to play the role of the Eurasian engineer in the Broadway production of *Miss Saigon*. In response to a clamorous protest from Asian American groups, Cameron Mackintosh, the producer, allegedly claimed he had "look[ed] under every rock" in search of an Asian American actor but failed to find one. United Actors' Equity recognized Asian Americans' protest and, as a result, did not issue a card for Pryce to work in the US. This decision, then led Mackintosh to cancel the show. However, succumbing to the loss of millions of dollars and jobs for theatre people due to the cancellation, Actors' Equity reversed their decision. *Miss Saigon* opened in February 1991 featuring Pryce as the Engineer (Kondo 229).

⁶⁷ Kondo, in *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*, includes negative reviews: "Kevin Kelly of the *Boston Globe* wrote, 'Face Value illuminates very little. It proves as *shrill as its real-life stimulus* [her emphasis]. Worse, for all the intensity of its message, it's labored and unfunny." She also mentions that "audience nervousness around race may indicate that a farce about race, especially by a person of color, may be too unsettling at this historical juncture. Hwang opined that audiences, both in Boston and on Broadway, were unsure whether or not it was alright to laugh" (236).

Bondage, Trying to Find Chinatown and *Face Value*—pointed to a resistance to this traditional epistemology model, one that seeks to naturalize the Other. This concern is in sympathy with Lévinas, in that both affirm the danger of totalitarian politics, i.e., labeling and stereotyping in the case of races.

Hwang envisions a state where there is an openness with identity, where identity is not a constraint and may have more fluid meaning (and may involve some degree of choice). This could mean that Hwang suggests that identity per se should not exist. Or Hwang may indicate that some of the almost *a priori* appeal to attributes, i.e., race, gender, sexuality, etc. should not predetermine a person's outlook or worth. For instance, one can choose to be in a group where that shares the same value system, like Americans share the democratic outlook. Regardless of how Hwang specifically views the limits or possibilities of identity, he seems to argue, in keeping with Lévinas, that an ethics comes before identity.

After 17 years, Hwang reworked the material of *Face Value* and produced the brilliant play *Yellow Face*, a piece that exhibited a strategic shift in the playwright's thinking on race and ethnicity. *Yellow Face* is divided into two acts. A form of “mocumentary,” facts and fantasies are interwoven throughout the entire play. This strategy aims to mock the alleged *objective* stance of the media, as seen in the framing of the face-off between DHH⁶⁸ (stage character of Hwang) and the reporter in the second act.

Act I employs “the scattershot quoting of headlines, bylines, and datelines to identify its events and characters” (Gross). The first event is a recap of the Miss Saigon controversy, which began with the casting of Jonathan Pryce, a white actor, to play the role of the Eurasian engineer in the Broadway production of *Miss Saigon*. In response to a clamorous protest from Asian

⁶⁸ DHH is the embodiment of Hwang himself in *Yellow Face*. But because this is a faux memoir, DHH does not equate to Hwang.

American groups, Cameron Mackintosh, the producer, allegedly claimed he had “look[ed] under every rock” in search of an Asian- American actor but failed to find one. United Actors’ Equity recognized Asian Americans’ protest and, as a result, did not issue a card for Pryce to work in the US. This decision, then led Mackintosh to cancel the show. However, anticipating the loss of millions of dollars and jobs for theatre people due to the cancellation, Actors’ Equity reversed their decision. *Miss Saigon* opened in February 1991 featuring Pryce as the Engineer (Kondo 229).

This complicated and contentious production context informs the background of the play, in which Hwang writes himself in as a character. The situation grows more complicated (and here one notes the issues of racial purity and fluid identity) when Hwang depicts himself as DHH in the casting process in *Face Value*. While one of the two actors who comes to the audition, Rodney Hatamiya, is obviously an Asian American, Hwang does not choose him. Hwang instead prefers another actor, Marcus G. Dahlman, whose appearance is a hundred percent Caucasian but whose racial background remains unclear. Because Actor’s Equity rules that a producer cannot ask about an actor’s ethnicity, Marcus is able to hedge his bets on the matter.

DHH’s decision to cast Marcus creates a crisis. This decision has many implications, for the leading man in *Face Value* is supposed to be an Asian masked in white face, as a parody of the traditional “yellow face.” However, when the casting director asks, “does he look Asian to you?” DHH is faced with a dilemma and must confront the question of “authenticity”:

STUART. But guys, does he--? Does he look Asian to you?

DHH. What do you mean, “look Asian”?

STUART. Well, he doesn’t seem to possess—any Asian features...at all.

DHH. And what exactly are “Asian features”?

STUART. He’s got dark hair, but—

DHH. Short, high cheekbones, slanty eyes?

STUART. David—

DHH. I gotta say, I find your question sort of offensive. Asian faces come in a variety of shapes and sizes—just like any other human beings. Which we are, you know.

STUART. Miles, is he Asian?

NEWMAN. . . . He's not full-blooded—

DHH. He's Eurasian. You want to start discriminating against *them* now?

STUART. David, if our leading man, who's supposed to be an Asian dressing up in white face—if when he takes off his makeup, he still looks white—would that bother you?

DHH. “Looks white”—to whom? Other white people? (21-22)

So after Marcus gets this role, DHH learns from Rodney that Marcus is a purely white. This creates a highly ironic situation in that DHH, “Leader of *Miss Saigon* protest casts white guy as Asian—by mistake!” (26) Marcus, on the other hand, enjoys his new Asian identity and uses language that has been employed by those discriminated against because of their ethnic appearance. He declares: “Never let anyone tell you that what you look like is who you are. Those are the limitations we have to fight. Even people who look like me. Especially people who look like me” (37). Such expressions reproduce the language often used by DHH himself. Meanwhile, at the end of this act DHH hears from his father, HYH, that in a zealous moment he has made a large donation to Bill Clinton's campaign-- because Clinton loved HYH's idea of “Chinese Republican Bankers for Clinton” (34).

The story of *Yellow Face* takes on a serious tone in Act II , when Hwang brings material into the play concerning anti-Asian hysteria in the late nineties and the true life events

surrounding accusations against his father for money-laundering and collaboration with China⁶⁹, and his involvement in the Wen Ho Lee espionage⁷⁰. These real-life events provide the background for Hwang's face-off with a news reporter, an encounter following which each writer would give his own subjective interpretation. These experiences would lead to "an exposé of Hwang's father for the two-faced journalist, and a final chapter for Hwang in the saga that will become *Yellow Face*" (Gross).

Through the farcical situation of miscasting Marcus in act I and the unjust accusation of Lee and HYH in act II, Hwang raises important questions concerning multiculturalism. In his review of *Yellow Face*, Samuel Park rightly points out that unlike Hwang's other race plays, which were written "in the early days of the multicultural debate and championed 'Asian American' as a coalitional identity, *Yellow Face* pinpoints the difficulty of rehearsing such monolithic communities in a globalized world, ultimately questioning the viability of race as a successful marker of difference" (280). So *Yellow Face* not only reasserts Hwang's earlier question concerning the issue of racial/ethnic authenticity, it also challenges some aspects of multiculturalism, which may only offer a token to salute diversity, and which may demand racial allegiances and qualifiers of belonging (in face of multiple and competing identity positions). In other words, as much as multiculturalism demands respect for the Other, acting against the appropriation of a Western viewpoint, its own methods may involve dynamics of subordination

⁶⁹ Henry Y. Hwang was under senate investigation regarding his transactions with the Chinese government via Chinese-American banks, among which were the first Asian American bank and Far East National Bank, of which Henry Hwang was the founder. In *Yellow Face*, Hwang uses the original article in the *New York Times*: "NWOAOC: *New York Times*, May 11, 1999. China sent cash to U.S. bank, with suspicions slow to rise. Written by—(Sound cue: "Name Withheld on Advice of Counsel.") Late in the spring of 1996, federal bank examiners discovered that the central bank of China was moving tens of millions of dollars into the United States, depositing it in a maze of accounts...at a small California bank...Far East National... (Pause) [Far East National's CEO, Henry Y.] Hwang, 69, is a well-known figure among Chinese Americans in Los Angeles... [Hwang's] office is decorated with photographs of himself with various American presidents, including Bill Clinton, and with a poster from *M. Butterfly*, the Broadway hit written by his son, David Henry Hwang, who was formerly a director of the bank" (50). Hwang then notes that "an underlined ellipses (...) denotes a deletion within a quotation" (8).

⁷⁰ Lee the scientist was unjustly accused of spying for the Chinese government. (See Park's rev. of *Yellow Face*.)

and violence (invoking in its own right a Self/Other power relation) wherein the individual's value is instilled within the coherent racial labels that "[act] upon them from the outside in" (282).

Devising *Yellow Face* as a "mocumentary" proves an effective strategy for Hwang, as he seeks to set forth a political envisioning of "race" as well as a criticism of the multicultural movement. In "Masks or Farces Re-Visited: A Study of Four Theatrical Works Concerning Cultural Identity," theatre scholars William H. Sun and Faye C. Fei claim that Hwang's decision to structure and fashion *Face Value* as a farce may have been the reason for its failure; because farce generally creates the expectation of clear execution and a straightforward targeting of its satire. Audiences consequently experienced confusion in face of the play's complicated issues and muddled action. If Hwang in fact committed this blunder with *Face Value*, he would not do so again. In an interview he admitted that, while he had been wanting to fix *Face Value* for seventeen years, he could not think of a proper way to do so:

Then I started thinking about the stage documentary form--making it a mock stage documentary that would poke fun at some of the absurdities of the multicultural movement. It seemed easiest to poke fun at myself, since that way I would be offending only me. Then I figured the play would begin and end with two fairly public events--the Miss Saigon thing [*Hwang* and other artists protested the casting of Jonathan Pryce in an Asian role] and the charges leveled against my father in the late '90s. This would be a way of exploring all the different facets of *yellow face*. (Qtd. in Viertel)

This section of my chapter analyzes Hwang's criticism of multiculturalism in terms of the Self-Other relationship. Emphasizing the acceptance of the Other (minor culture), multiculturalism still operates within an ethical frame wherein "authenticity" dominates, and hence strengthens the essentialism of both the Self and the Other. Therefore, I argue that Hwang considers multiculturalism still working within a traditional epistemology.

The rise of multiculturalism situated Hwang in the place of a hero/spokesperson within the minority group (Asian American). While personally he disapproves of such an (racial) authenticity, under the trend of multiculturalism he unavoidably became the role model: people believed he was writing plays to claim a place for Asian Americans.

What is the difference between Hwang's ideas about (racial) identity and those that multiculturalism proposes? Hwang does not think race/appearance can be the differentiating marker, because such a marker, Hwang suggests, is based on stereotypes and risks reducing the individual's value before the stereotypical label. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, affirms/accepts appearance (racial attribute) as a differentiating marker but proposes that this marker should not lead to discriminatory treatment. This quest for protecting the different informs Actors' Equity's rule that casting directors cannot inquire about an actors' racial background (a policy deemed as a multiculturalist legacy).

This clarification of the difference between Hwang and multiculturalism is crucial in understanding Marcus' casting in Hwang's play. First of all, the fact that Actors Equity overthrew its own original decision to submit to the market (mainstream value) proves multiculturalism has its own limit. After all, forbidding the inquisition of an actor's racial background is a means of treating the symptom instead of getting to the root of the racial inequality problem. So multiculturalism still reveals the authentic/monolithic mindset, despite its attempted advocacy for accepting multiplicities and diversity. In other words, if there is no issue of racial (actors) inequality, then there's no need for Actors' Equity to set up such rules. That is, the rule would not be necessary if prejudice and unjust practices were not continuing (like a "do not litter" sign would not be necessary if people were not littering).

Further, by enhancing its essentialism, the multiculturalist movement gives Hwang a sort of "heroic status." Despite that his plays reveal his disapproval of "authenticity," he is hailed as "a

model” (for Asian American). His writing has been perceived as writing for the monolithic minority group. In other words, within the ethical frame of multiculturalism Hwang occupies a cultural position that provides and sustains power (one that Marcus finds fascinating).

After DHH passes off Marcus as an Asian, by saying Marcus’ father is a Jew from Siberia (a city in Asia), Marcus takes on a minority identity under the stage name of Marcus Gee. Marcus is soon hailed as the hero of the minority group. He enjoys this new identity so much that he refuses to take off the “yellow mask.” So when Marcus’ true ethnicity is revealed, one notes a highly ironic and complicated situation— DHH casts a white actor *pretending* to be Asian in a satire (*Face Value*) to protest the Miss Saigon controversy—where a Caucasian *masked* as an Asian has been targeted and criticized. In other words, while DHH writes *Face Value* to debunk a false representation of Asians, Marcus refuses to take off the mask (race pretension). He is unwilling to leave the empowered cultural position, thanks to the essentialization enhanced by multiculturalist movement.

Therefore through Marcus’ actions, Hwang suggests that multicultural movement is less ethical than political in nature. That is, the movement’s ethical end—of bringing respect and honor to difference—is compromised with political manipulation. Not only is it difficult to use racial attributes as a differentiating marker, it is also problematic to use such a marker to carry out an ethical task. While multiculturalism manifests a call for equal treatment for different racial groups, its understanding of identity based on appearance or group traits can lead to political oppressions (within the group).

However, what Hwang does clearly indict is the still implicit racism of American society. This is evident in Act II, where HYH is accused of money laundering as a Chinese spy (representing other anti-Asian hysteria events in the late nineties). Sitting on the board of his father’s Far East National Bank for a few years, DHH also finds himself a target of the

investigation. Hwang reveals the xenophobic mindset beneath the seemingly neutral and objective media coverage through the face-off between the journalist NWOAOC (Name Withheld on Advice of Counsel) and DHH.

NWOAOC: . . . Mr. Hwang, your father is a Chinese banker.

DHH: Chinese American.

NWOAOC: Exactly.

DHH: There's a difference.

NWOAOC: And it's that difference that interests me. If I were investigating Israeli espionage, I would look to the Jewish community--it's just logical. *Does your father see himself as more American, or more Chinese?*

DHH: That question makes no sense.

NWOAOC: On the contrary, I think it's quite relevant.

DHH: How about you? Do you see yourself as more American or more white?

NWOAOC: That's not the same thing.

DHH: No?

NWOAOC: Not in the least.

DHH: Why not?

NWOAOC: *Because there's no conflict between being white and being American.*

DHH: Did you really just say that? There's a conflict--between being Chinese and being American?

. . .

(my emphasis; 55-56)

This exchange reveals the presumption that there is no conflict between being white and being American. This is the root of the problem, that Hwang is wary of (authenticity), and does not think methods like the multiculturalist movement can fix. This face-off, taking place after HYH's passionate donation (for Clinton campaign) and the implicit accusation of him being a Chinese spy, reveals Hwang's concern of a prejudice ingrained within the traditional epistemology. Such epistemology centers on a Eurocentric Nationalism, one that presumes a monolithic culture and value as indicated in Ban Wang's article. Within such context, multiculturalism, a movement that proposes recognition that the country is composed of multiplicities, only pays lip-service to minorities. Despite multiculturalist movement, there is still the presumption of a dominant culture that always keeps a watchful eye on Other race/cultures, and implicitly marshals minor cultures into a process of assimilation, as Joan W. Scott discusses.

Hwang's plays thus show a suspicion of domination on at least two levels. First, as shown above, here is clearly wary of an American nationalism that sees the Asian Other with prejudice. However, he is also concerned with a multicultural politics that constrains individuals and bases group coherence on identity markers. Both, for Hwang, would seem to operate on a model of antagonism, one where the motive is to maintain a coherence of the Self. Therefore multiculturalism (as with American nationalism) still operates on the level of traditional epistemology, in a Lévinasian sense, where the Self is threatened by the unknown Other. While the movement implies a respect for the Other, its emphasis on using appearance (or other identity traits) as a differentiating marker again reveals a totalitarian impulse. The Self-Other relationship in the multiculturalist movement does not differ from that inherited from traditional epistemology. In short, the racial/ethnic group functions as a Self seeking to overcome or subsume difference within its ranks. In addition, the fact that the multicultural movement has

enacted political undertakings (seeking power for the group) may put in a lesser light its ethical component (that is, responsibility for the Other outside of identity).

In the play, HYH is the scapegoat in the witch hunt of the (foreign) “face”—a mask (racial stereotype) that works outside in of mainstream subjectivity. HYH, however, believes his American identity can be achieved, that he can be a real American by his identification with this country. Hwang recounts that his late father died because his dream had been lost: “Sick as I got of hearing his shtick, it had been Dad’s whole life: his faith that in America, you can imagine who you want to be—and, through sheer will and determination, become that person. (*Pause.*) If only it were true” (62). One may finally question if it is an identification that is not decided on appearance but on will and determination that informs the identity politics that Hwang acclaims.

In her production of Hwang’s *Yellow Face*,⁷¹ Leigh Silverman set up a gigantic mirror upstage reflecting the actors and audience. Samuel Park commends this powerful use of the mirror at the end of the play, when it is used as a “striking window into a village in China, suggesting the folly of solipsistic concerns over personal identity and the importance of empathizing with those potentially thought of as foreign to us” (Park). This window opening on China recalls Marcus’s email at the outset of the play where he describes his journey to a remote corner of China. This device also highlights the face of the Other at the very end—the window symbolizing a crack in the Self’s epistemological fortress.

This highly affecting ending, and the overall impact of Hwang’s play, seeks to bring ethics down to a face-to-face level, a movement that confirms the view of Spivak. As Amit S. Rai points out: “For Spivak responsibility lies in alterity, in the call of the Other. And yet it would seem that this other is also a living, struggling person, or sometimes a certain type of person”

⁷¹ Directed by Leigh Silverman. Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles. 22 May 2007.

(Rai). Because a totalitarian epistemology imposed on the Other is all too easy way to approach the Other, it avoids the work of encounter and the weight of responsibility. It is easy not to look around the world but to remain insulated in the Self. For instance, consumers enjoy material goods but they have no idea how some workers may suffer in the manufacturing of these goods. They have no way to empathize with workers' toil in the sweatshops because they do not encounter specific workers as human beings, but only reduce them to a function related to product and productivity. In a racial context, people likewise do not empathize with other races because they label them with stereotypical imaginings.

This bit of face-to-face encounter in a global world, where the acceleration of manufacturing and consumption override everything, is difficult to achieve. A lack of communication and encounter strengthens the "interior economy," in Lévinas's words, and preempts responsibility (which can contribute to exploitation and global degradation).

Though they emphasize different aspects, *The Sound of a Voice* and *Yellow Face* both point to how the Self-Other relationship of the Western tradition and its problem in dealing with difference. Demonstrating an order that celebrates the Same and Totality, *The Sound of a Voice* exposes traditional Western epistemology through romantic love. *Yellow Face* elaborates on how this epistemology brings about racial conflicts. Lévinas's work invites new ways of thinking about difference and relation, and is helpful in discussing racial issues. The term "wisdom of love" attributes a respectful coexistence of different peoples, a state where Self meets and greets the Other. The term "love of wisdom," on the other hand, suggests a subject/object relationship where the Self deems the Other (races) as an object (of knowledge). The two outlooks decide different orders of ontology and ethics, and can write different stories in race histories.

Chapter Five:

The Female and Desubjectification

The correlation between women and the term “Other” has a long history in twentieth-century academia. Appropriated by scholars in discourses concerning post-colonial and feminist studies, “Other” often refers to fragile and suppressed subaltern groups. Scholarship has investigated this subordinate status and the many ways that women have been positioned in secondary roles and oppressed conditions. Traditionally women have been viewed as passive and malleable, contained and limited by law and social structures. The latter half of the twentieth-century witnessed a significant change in women’s social and economic status; this effort continues to promote and protect women’s workplace and domestic rights, though many obstacles still remain, as women all too often still inhabit the position of the Other.

While women have appeared onstage since the beginning of American theatre, a theatre for and about women, made by women has been relatively recent, coming into existence in the 1960s. One question that has challenged and sometimes troubled feminist stage practice and women’s performance is the very question of how to *present* women. Should theatre attempt to represent existing women, the status quo, or should it launch a revolutionary agenda, seeking to actively change “women” for a better future? Should such theatre use conventional forms or work to expand performance styles? How should the stage present a woman as agent in a patriarchal world?

This chapter will explore such issues by discussing feminist playwright Paula Vogel’s works. The chapter will first survey the historical and cultural background of the feminist movement and feminist theatre, and it will then discuss how Vogel’s ideas and theatrical techniques stand out from those of other feminist playwrights. The remainder of the chapter will

analyze two of Vogel's works, *Hot 'n' Throbbing* and *And Baby Makes 7*, to elucidate her theatrical methodologies and goals, that is, how her particular feminist theatre serves to disrupt patriarchal discourses and to envision alternative feminine subjectivities. My discussion will also bring Vogel's work into conversation with the thinking of Emmanuel Lévinas, whose work offers new insights in the Self-Other relation and the possibilities of a non-traditional subjectivity.

The twentieth-century feminist movement can roughly be divided into three waves. The first wave began in the early 1900s (leading to women gaining the right to vote in 1920); following this achievement, the Women's Rights Movement kept on with organized activities and various efforts in reform (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter). For instance, Alice Paul, the leader of the National Woman's Party, drafted an Equal Rights Amendment for the United States Constitution. This proposed legislation appealed for both genders to have equal rights. Also, at this time appeared Margaret Sanger, a public health nurse, who proposed public policies for birth control. She forwarded the idea that women should strive to gain the right to control their own bodies, as traditionally women's bodies had been viewed as vehicles for reproduction. Generally, the first-wave feminist movement focused more on reform than revolt, and it also aimed at minimizing gender differences.⁷²

The second-wave feminist movement took place within the civil rights movements of the 1960s. This movement encouraged actions taken on the government's part to address issues of discrimination against women. After President Kennedy convened a Commission on the Status of Women in 1963, federal and state laws followed that targeted discrimination and extended regulation into both the domestic and work spheres. In the same year Betty Friedan's publication

⁷² There is another stance arguing that "first-wave feminism" began "in the late 18th century with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and ended with the ratification of the Twentieth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which protected a woman's right to vote." See Tom Head's "Third-Wave Feminism."

of *The Feminine Mystique* signaled a new era when women could look beyond their roles as housekeepers. The second wave movement was more revolutionary than reformist in nature. Second wave feminists were often called radical feminists, who devoted to feelings and experiences exclusive to women. Kathie Sarachild, a radical feminist who had been a member of the New York Radical Women, explained that this search into the nature of women was analogous to 17th century's quest for science (to oppose scholasticism)⁷³. Hence, second-wave feminism is often characterized by its appeal to essentialism. This wave emphasized the positive attributes of the female and asserted the female in a position of primacy over the male. It focused on shared qualities and the nature of women as a whole, often drawing on the body as the locus of female power.

In contrast to the second-wave feminist movement, the third-wave movement disagrees with essentialism. There is an awareness that both the first and second-wave movements seemed limited in outlook, only focusing on the struggles of white, heterosexual, and middle-class women, hence ignoring the rights of women of color, , lesbians, bisexual women, and transgendered women, low-income women and women in the developing countries. Viewed as an evolution of the previous waves, this third-wave movement may also be understood in generational terms. As Tom Head explains: "it refers to how the feminist struggle manifests itself in the world today. Just as second-wave feminism represented the diverse and sometimes competing interests of feminists who struggled together under the banner of women's liberation, third-wave feminism represents a generation that has begun with the achievements of the second wave." Most importantly, however, the third-wave feminists focused more on "woman" as a

⁷³ Sarachild puts it this way: "The decision to emphasize our own feelings and experiences as women and to test all generalizations and reading we did by our own experience was actually the scientific method of research. We were in effect repeating the 17th century challenge of science to scholasticism: 'study nature, not books,' and put all theories to the test of living practice and action." See Nachescu, Voichita. "Radical Feminism and the Nation: History and Space in the Political Imagination of Second-Wave Feminism."

social construction—rather than a given essence—and sought to critique the institutions and discourses that situated the female in a position of subordination.

While the feminist movement has a rather long history, feminist theatre appears as a more recent phenomenon. Theatre professor Sue Ellen Case points out in her 1985 work *Feminism and Theatre* that “the feminist movement was only twenty years old and feminist theatre practice younger still” (4). In the United States, female playwrights remained outside the dramatic canon until the 1970s. In 1978, director Julia Miles voiced concern with the continued gender disparity among theatre practitioners.⁷⁴ Fortunately the issue of gender disparity was improved. In 1992, Miles wrote: “There is now a nucleus of powerful women playwrights’ voices and they write both women’s issue plays and public-issue plays. They write in order to explore human values and the desires for transcendence of self . . . their audience will share an idea, a feeling, a dream they have struggled to make into a play” (ix).

Miles’ concern about the lack of women in the American theatre reflects the aspiration of first-wave feminists, who focus on the “inclusion of works by, for, and about women” (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter). Such a view brings attention to challenges and problems with such practice. Many of the scholars who write on American drama focus on the great works of American male playwrights and often claim that women’s plays “lack universality.” Such critics clearly cannot validate a female-gendered subjectivity (Martin Roudane 113). Miles’ statement, on the other hand, also implies an essentialism that dominates the outlook of second-wave feminists, who concentrate on writing women’s stories that speak from women’s situations. Theatre critic Martin Roudane indicates that the languages women playwrights use to animate their works create a woman-centered universe. Their works “validate a set of behaviors and

⁷⁴ Miles points out that “only 7 percent of all plays produced Off-Broadway and regionally were written by women; 6% percent were directed by women” (Martin Roudane 113).

responses that celebrate the female as subject rather than object; the female as a central agent in her own life” (113).

Since feminist theatre is linked closely with the various feminist movements, one might expect such theatre to encounter the kind of resistance and backlash experienced generally by the women’s movement. Claiming to be a feminist theatre cannot in and of itself guarantee any success in the theatre market, especially as its efforts are often highly experimental. Just as the feminist movement sought to initiate social change, feminist theatre seeks change and challenge to the status quo. One may in fact view feminist theatre practice as “itself a form of cultural representation influenced by changes in the landscapes of feminism, women’s studies, economics, politics, and cultural studies” (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter). However, change is often met with strong resistance. As Linda Alcoff explains it, feminism involves “matching theory to practice” (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter), and feminist theatre may be seen as a kind of radical practice. However, box office reports frequently indicate modest support for such innovative and challenging shows. Too often women-oriented theatre has softened its critique in the hopes of gaining greater audiences. “[Those] that find success tend to take fewer risks and are generally less threatening to middle class audiences; commercial theatre’s response to feminism has been the same as the other media-token gestures often hiding deep hostility” (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter).⁷⁵

Given the resistance encountered by many feminists, and the challenges that women’s theatre has faced, there are many female playwrights who have rejected being labeled as feminist

⁷⁵ Successful plays O’Malley’s *Once a Catholic*, Wasserstein’s *Uncommon Women*, Dunn’s *Steaming*, Henley’s *Crimes of the Heart*, Norman’s *Getting Out* and *Night Mother* all focus on female characters and explore concepts/themes of feminist drama: relationships, sisterhood, sexuality, female autonomy—weakness tend to be comedies of manners, revelations of the surface level not challenges to the deeper social structure. Exceptions: Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls*, Gems’ *Piaf*, Churchill’s *Cloud Nine*). The scripts tend to be more challenging than the productions. (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter)

playwrights. Take Marsha Norman and Wendy Wasserstein as examples. Both active in the 1980s, both tended to depict female characters existing in a male-dominated American society. Instead of exploring and dramatizing a new female image/subjectivity, as the feminist social movement sought to advance, they tended to approach this “second sex” with a humanist, rather than a gender-approach. Norman herself expresses discomfort with being labeled a feminist playwright, and Wasserstein asserted that she wrote plays for both male and female audiences (Martin Roudane 132-33). Both may fall into the category of first-wave feminists who, as theatre scholar Jill Dolan explains in her criticism of Wasserstein, “sell[s] out to established systems like the meritocracy of mainstream American theatre without trying to challenge or change them” (434). Alisa Solomon also points out that the female playwrights who received Pulitzer Prizes in the 1980s, notably the two aforementioned and Beth Henley, represent “intelligent, educated women” who “assure us that they are funny for the same traditional reasons women have always been funny: they hate their bodies, can’t find a man, and don’t believe in themselves” (Qtd. in Savran *A Queer* 202).

It is against this example of appeasement and compromise that Paula Vogel stands out (she shares most in common with the third wave). Asserting that theatre should help women to explore and reconfigure their subjectivity, Vogel refuses a representation of women that follows the status quo. In many of her works, as theatre scholar David Savran points out, including *Desdemona*, *Meg*, *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing* and *And Baby Makes 7*, Vogel deliberately appropriates patriarchal texts. Through such “damning appraisal” (Savran’s words) of men’s texts, Vogel gives evidence of how one might envision a re-imagination of female subjectivities, through a fundamental reexamination of the Self-Other relationship. If humanist approaches only depict females inhabiting their current position of subjugation, reinforcing the female as the victimized image of the “Other,” the feminine as a projection of the Self/patriarch, then Vogel’s works

signal a new possibility; they explore alternative encounters and images and offer a novel understanding of the Self-Other relationship.

Born in 1951, Paula Vogel is a playwright and professor at Brown University. Vogel came to prominence with her Obie award-winning play *The Baltimore Waltz* (1992), an AIDS-related dark-comedy. Her Pulitzer Prize-winning play *How I Learned To Drive* (1997), however, is her best-known work, one that depicts incestuous sexual abuse. Along with *The Oldest Profession* (1981), which deals with prostitution, *And Baby Makes Seven* (1984), which gives a whimsical alternative to the traditional familial relationship, and *Hot 'N Throbbing* (1994), a face-off between patriarchal discourse and female narratives that interweave elements of domestic abuse and pornography, these works reveal Vogel's daring and willing venture into taboo and controversial issues.

Vogel's plays stand as distinctive works in the American theatre, both for their subject matter and style. Many critics, such as Jill Dolan, admire Vogel's choice of topics, especially how the works address difficult and sensitive issues. Vogel cites no clear methodology or polemical intent; she asserts that she "'writes the play backwards,' moving from emotional circumstances and character to craft narrative structure" ("The New Fellows of 2010" 4). She also explains: "My writing isn't actually guided by issues ... I only write about things that directly impact my life" ("The New Fellows of 2010" 4). Vogel's work and approach are admonished by some critics, who believe that her mingling of comedy and satire often "diminishes the seriousness of [her] drama's emotional impact" ("Vogel, Paula – Introduction"). Other critics prize such novelty and ingenuity. David Savran, for example, views Vogel's approach with a positive lens:

The effect of this defamiliarization is to allow spectators and readers to see these characters and their situations in a new light, to reevaluate the meaning of

women's work outside the home, or to celebrate the elements of fantasy that necessarily structure all relationships. (Savran in Vogel xi)

What Savran identifies is a crucial aspect of Vogel's playwriting. I argue that Vogel's unusual dramatic techniques and practices of defamiliarization serve a thematic end, that is, the defamiliarization can equate to a desubjectification. Vogel's plays explore the phenomenon of desubjectification, whereby the traditional female category and subjectivity are exploded. In a manner that is unique to Vogel, her plays seek to overhaul existing femininities, by dismantling them and presenting the possibility of new subjectivities.

Because Vogel is an avowed feminist, her plays are about women and women's attempts to find their place in the world. Her belief in the instability of gender as a signifier and drama as "the most dialogical of all literary forms" (Savran *A Queer* 187) allows her to explore alternative narrative practices and voices, her works invoking a wide range of gender discourses. The women in her plays, instead of appearing as individual agents with completed subjectivities, defy any sense of insularity and wholeness and present a different potentiality, a fluid, alternative femininity, one that undergoes testing and experimentation in Vogel's theatrical lab. Such explorations aim to contest patriarchal imposition. While many of Vogel's contemporary (feminist) playwrights⁷⁶ also expose the repressed condition of women, Vogel stands out not only for her unique (narrative and theatrical) style, but also, and more importantly, for the way she breaks the representation of "misogynist clichés and stereotypes"⁷⁷ of women for liberatory purposes. This overthrow of female images, of status quo representations, initiates a search for new images, for an alternative relationship between the feminine and patriarchal social structures (new Self-Other relationship)--hence, the envisioning and new imaginings of female subjectivity. It is this investigation of subjectivity that marks Vogel's playwriting. In an interview with David

⁷⁶ This excludes Wasserstein, according to Dolan.

⁷⁷ "Not all the plays by Henley, Norman, and Wasserstein from this period focus on the affluent and cultured, but most recycle these misogynist clichés and stereotypes in a surprisingly uncritical way" (Savran *A Queer* 202).

Savran (June 4, 1997), Vogel describes this “feminist approach” as a reimagining and overhaul of female subjectivity. She relates: “How can I [(i.e., Vogel herself)] seduce both the men in the audience to identify directly, to empathize directly with the female subject, and to retrain women in the audience to identify directly with the female subject? It’s a problem of retraining” (Qtd. in Savran *The Playwright’s Voice* 273). Former colleague and acquaintance, David Savran has given close attention to Vogel’s work, and his assessment of Vogel’s handling of subjectivity is most insightful:

For [Vogel’s] works like so many recent feminist writing, does not deny the different material and ideological effects produced by the opposition between masculine and feminine. It does, however, question the finality of this division, not by offering a radically different vision of society but by insinuating an alternative model of subjectivity. . . Paula usually requires only one self-contradictory subject who encloses within her or him both this debilitating division and a remedy for that division. . . Paula more often than not gesture toward a future that is utterly different, a fantastic, utopian future in which lovers can be forever reunited and self-division healed. (*A Queer* 203)

While I am reluctant to identify the self-division as a “symptom” of some victimized syndrome, I do share with Savran the belief that Vogel takes a different stance, that she proposes an alternative to the victim-blaming tendency for which the second-wave feminists are so often noted. In fact, this Self-division aspect is key to her work. It is through this phenomenon that one witnesses the desubjectification of a character. As the character experiences multiple narrative selves, a healing process can occur (it is thus not a symptom of pathology but rather an indicator of health). This process may be seen in terms of a past Self (*How I Learned to Drive*), an enacted alter ego (*And Baby Makes 7*), or an embodied fictional figure created by the character (*Hot ‘n’ Throbbing*). Importantly, it is here that we may bring Lévinas into conversation with Vogel’s theatre, as her methodology of de-subjctification exhibits dynamics that are similar to the movements Lévinas sets forth in his notion of “existence with existents.”

What is *existence without existent*?

The autonomous subjectivity operates upon the assumption that it is a rational subjectivity. It defines itself according to its ability to categorize and organize, to come to comprehension of the universe. It makes the universe intelligible by supplying itself, as Lévinas explains, a reason “for every being and a reason for every reason, making itself the unfailing source of reasons” (EE, 8). Subjectivity appears as “the self-activating power to operate gear, to organize for itself a practical field. The leap from a means to an end. . . from a palpable configuration to the telos it refers to or relates to or signifies, is the metaphysical thrust that opens a field, that reveals a world” (EE, 8).

This kind of existence with subjectivity is tantamount to conscious subjectivity. What Lévinas reflects upon, however, are existences other than a conscious/rational one; in other words, existences without subjectivity/rationality. Sleep, for instance, is not a suspension of existence, but another mode of being/existence. Non-conscious existence should not be defined as an opposition vis-à-vis a conscious existence.

Lévinas believes that before the consciousness/Self is born, there is only existence, the Being, in which many existents (without subjectivity) are not categorized as “object” but just “beings,” because “object” is itself an idea derived from the opposition of “subject.” Being remains, like a field of forces, like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one. . .” (EE, 58). For Lévinas, it is through the interaction with, or “eating up” of the others, that an existent gradually forms its interior economy, and thereby produces its own consciousness.

Therefore the state before an existent can have a rational grasp on reality, interpret its world using a self-centered perspective, is what Lévinas terms as “existence without existent.” This is the state when the existent is not yet aware of its distinction between Others (not have its own objects), when the existent’s “interiority” is not yet formed—a reality of its interior

economy that pivots on its rationality, that centers on itself as a “unfailing sources of reasons” (EE, 8). In other words, what Lévinas articulates is a state where an existent/being has not yet been born or emerged from the existence/Being. This is a state where there is no consciousness of Self or of Others. It is a state before any closed identity.

Through desubjectification Vogel points toward the return to such a state. This process may shed the patriarchal skin from female subjectivity in the hope that a new one will be born from the “existence.” In other words, only through “destroying” the existing subject can there be possibilities for an overhauling of female subjectivity. By “destroying” I mean a subject loses his/her control over reality, or specifically, that he/she is not aware of his/her loss of control. It is theatre that can present such moments.

I think this concept can be helpful in understanding Vogel’s method of desubjectification. Through multiple narrative voices Vogel gives chances for her characters to explore alternative modes of being/existence. The self-division is not simply seen as an opposition to a single consciousness; rather, the division represents the potentialities of alternative existences. On stage these characters undergo moments of “existence without existents,” temporarily breaking out of the constraints of social imposition. In this theatre we see there are chances for revolution, for the overhauling and refashioning of subjectivity. As the translator of *Existence and existents*, Alphonso Lingis points out that this kind of a repositioning is not “equivalent to the inertia of things; it is a positive confiding of oneself to the world, and a relationship with the terrestrial, reservoir of support, prior to every relationship with things” (EE, 9).

In short, Vogel’s desubjectification seeks to erase the distinctness of subjectivity, to reduce an existent/subject into a pre-object mode, so that its present subjective contours are blurred. In this way the stage anatomizes a subjectivity, exposing the social and cultural drives that work on it, and reveals new imaginings. This movement rearranges the networking of those

drives, yielding the possibility of new networks, and thus new subjectivities. So in Vogel's works, alternative voices often erupt from the conventional and seemingly complete but traumatic self. The self divides into different parts, and subjectivity appears in flux. Actions are taken on stage, but, more often than not, the audience is not sure who is doing them. It is a moment where "the author" of the self is indeterminate, as if the character no longer function as an enclosed subject, but rather a container or a contested arena where various social and cultural forces knot and disperse. By doing so, such playwriting has the opportunity of "canceling and deforming the structures that have held women framed, stilled, embedded. . ." (Savran *A Queer* 192).

I will first discuss Vogel's play *Hot 'n' Throbbing*, where characters are shown to labor under masculinist discourses and appear to be sites for the voicing of dominant ideologies. The characters in this play may come to the verge of desubjectification (even transformation), that is, Charlene may experience the divided and fluid Self; however, the play finally shows the triumph of masculine imposition. Aside from depicting the central female character as an identity inscribed by patriarchal structures, the play seems to challenge second-wave thinking, that is, that women can inhabit a place of their own and assert an essentialist female voice. Through representing the failure of the self-alleged feminist (Charlene), the play indicates Vogel's rejection of second-wave feminism and its quest for an "all-women theatre." Vogel questions this outlook, which wishes to attain the goal of empowerment through a simple inversion of the subject-object position (i.e., for women to actively claim what has been traditionally claimed by men). Through the representation of this failure, the play challenges the dominant/subordinate binary itself and thus seeks a new way to disrupt patriarchal discourse.

Following this discussion of *Hot 'n' Throbbing*, I will examine how Vogel's play *And Baby Makes 7* goes beyond the reach of the prior work. While *Hot 'n' Throbbing* serves to

challenge second-wave notions and reveals how gender is set and delimited by a masculinist power structure (that is, how gender is constructed), *And Baby Makes 7* dramatizes the possibility of moving beyond the dynamics of patriarchy; the play investigates the phenomenon of desubjectification, which might promise a new form of feminine subjectivity. Through the notion of “growing up,” Vogel depicts a subject’s transformation from what Lévinas’s terms the “virile ego,” a position of independence, to one of interdependence in an “effeminate” ethical relationship (see second section). In having the characters yield their dominance before the Other, they realize that responsibility to the Other is one crucial aspect in the make-up of the Self’s subjectivity. Moreover, the characters experience the state of an existent without existence—a condition outside of fixed identity commitments.

Hot ‘n’ Throbbing

Produced by the American Repertory Theatre, *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing* first opened on April 16, 1994 at the Hasty Pudding Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Vogel 227). Dealing with domestic violence and the female attempt to search for an independent sexuality and subjectivity, the play was credited with being timely and significant.

Critics agreed that the play identified an element of concern for society, the spreading infiltration of violence and pornography. Domestic violence may not be an issue in all households, but its increasing frequency is alarming. Elyse Sommer’s review points out that

The exploration of violence and sexual excesses in the home and all around us fits right into our daily diet of print and television news stories. It's disarmingly timely coming as it does after a week with headlines ablaze with a dysfunctional Minnesota's teenager's multiple shooting spree and suicide. (“Hot ‘n’ Throbbing”)

While critics concurred that the play is about domestic violence, they debated the cause of that violence and the role of sexuality. They also questioned the tone and intent of Vogel’s work. Jason Zionman began his review: “I’m not sure if Paula Vogel’s ‘Hot ‘n’ Throbbing’ is a

comedy about domestic abuse or a tragedy about the effects of pornography”. Rutter focused on the question of desire and titillation: “Vogel treads familiar ground— the difference between what turns men and women on. . .” The play tries to do many things and presents the ambiguous nature of sexuality; it dramatizes a (female’s) yearning for an independent sexuality/subjectivity and for a society free of (sexual) violence. This vision and its accomplishment presented a tough and risky task.

However, Rutter’s assertion that “Charlene’s acceptance, the play argues, stems from her own indulgences into the fantasy world of porn”, is much too one-sided a reading of the play, and it misses the purpose of Vogel’s intent. Charlene does not in any facile way accept and approve of the status quo and a male-dominated understanding of sexuality. . . Zinoman and Brown, on the other hand, recognize the ambiguous, grey area of how female sex behaviors can be interpreted. Zinoman maintains a more neutral position, acknowledging that “Charlene makes a point of saying that while the female characters in her adult entertainment (she doesn’t like the word ‘pornography’) may be sex objects, they are always in control. Which is more than can be said for Charlene...” Further for Sommer, the contested arena between “male porn” and “the independence of female sexuality” dealt with in the play signals “. . . how cultural conditioning predisposes women to accept imbalanced and violent relationships and the deleterious effect of being witness to sexual and physical abuse on normal family bonding and emotional development” (“Hot ‘n’ Throbbing”).

In conclusion, the play depicts a tug of war between patriarchal sex discourses and the possible narration of an active female erotica.⁷⁸ While the play ends with a failure of the

⁷⁸ Vogel claims that she wrote this piece to several soundtracks, and one of them was Janet Jackson’s *Control* (particularly “Nasty”) (Vogel 234). As the lyric indicates in “Nasty”: “I’m not a prude (no)/ I just want some respect (that’s right)/ So close the door if you want me to respond (ooh ooh yeah)/ ‘Cause privacy is my middle name/ My

woman's pursuit of independent sexuality (she is killed), I think Vogel wishes to illuminate how a simple inversion of subject-object position (i.e., the women-centered theatre featured by second-wave feminists) is problematic in attaining the goal. In other words, by having a culturally passive subject (i.e., woman) actively voice and declare her desire does not guarantee a revolutionary overthrow of that dominant (patriarchal) culture. This methodology does not undo the women/female erotic narrative as the Other, to gain a more balanced relationship with patriarchal discourse as the Self. Moreover, Vogel in the play gives emphasis to the constructed nature of the female, how Charlene, even in considering herself independent, still voices and is controlled by masculinist discourses. While Charlene herself cannot overthrow the dominant discourses (as she employs them), one may argue that Vogel as playwright—in illuminating and mimicking/satirizing such discourses—may create a kind of disturbance, one that destabilizes masculine authority. However, what Vogel dramatizes is not a reversal of power positions. Rather, the position of a new subjectivity comes from a process of desubjectification, a phenomenon illuminated by Lévinas's notion of "existence without existents."

Featuring domestic (sexual) violence, *Hot 'n' Throbbing* depicts a fairly conventional story, the violent struggle between a wife and her ex-husband, though the form of narration is quite unconventional, employing "several bodied and disembodied narrators" (Savran *A Queer* 189). The plot is simple. Charlene is a single mother who supports her hardscrabble life by writing erotic scripts for an allegedly feminist film company—Gyno Productions. She considers herself a feminist; her works, different from traditional porn that centers on male fantasies, are specifically for women. The play unfolds with Charlene's daughter, scantily clad Leslie Ann (The Girl) announcing that she is going to spend the night with her best friend, Lisa, an assertion that leads

last name is Control/ No my first name ain't baby/ It's Janet/ Miss Jackson if you're nasty," there is always a risk of women trapped in incurring disrespect if they are active in sexual behaviors. See "Janet Jackson's Lyrics 'Control.'"

to a quarrel with Charlene and bickering with her brother, Calvin (The Boy), whom she terms a perverted geek.

As Leslie Ann makes her way out, Charlene expresses concern about Calvin, who, in sharp contrast, never hangs out. Following Calvin's exit from the house, Charlene's ex-husband Clyde, a gangbuster brute, breaks down the patio door and barges into the dwelling, despite the newly-issued restraining order against him. Charlene then pulls out her "protection" and shoots him (in the ass). Interestingly, the story at this juncture shifts drastically to a tone reminiscent of romantic-thriller films. From this point on, the couple has a seemingly real heart-to-heart conversation, and we soon learn that Clyde is a poor loser who cannot afford a prostitute. In a gush of sympathy, enjoying the pleasure of being in control, Charlene decides to have sex with him. When she moves to retrieve another "protection" (i.e., contraception), the unstable husband exposes his hair-trigger temper and strangles her to death. The play ends with Leslie Ann (The Girl), ignoring her mother's corpse; she ages on stage and steps in as substitute for her mother, assuming the role of the female-erotica scriptwriter.

Vogel's play presents a number of issues and concerns. In this work we note Charlene's efforts to affirm her female agency and advance a female erotica. We note women seeking their own livelihoods. Just like Charlene, who gains a restraining order from her abusive ex-husband and must write to *fend* for her family, "Voice-Over" also appears as an *independent* sex worker who "claims herself" to be in control. Both represent female desire as something totally independent from patriarchal imposition—this purity of desire is in keeping with the values of cultural feminists. Charlene's outlook may finally give a too optimistic view of female assertion.

Charlene's effort suggests a position of power for the woman. Charlene's murder and the failure of her quest casts a skeptical light on her feminist agenda. Vogel seems here to question any notion of an insular female identity—one outside of social shaping and constraints. The play,

moreover, questions how a disruption of patriarchy is possible, how the female can exist beyond predetermined codes and expected behaviors.

Vogel's play fascinates in its investigation of gender roles and power relations. Its heightened theatricality and playful stylistics contribute heavily to the work's appeal. The setting of the play is indicated as Charlene's living room, a platform between two booths where The Voice and Voice Over (the foxy dominatrix) respectively reside. Alternating "stage lights" and the "blue light" indicate the shifting between reality and the fantasy of the erotic dance hall. Vogel indicates The Voice as "a presence, more than a person. At times he acts as a bouncer/owner in the erotic dance hall. . . The Voice breathes a lot through the mike. The Voice's dialect varies from German, French, Victorian British and Brooklynese. It often sounds just like The Man . . ." (232). The Voice clearly embodies a male discourse regarding sexuality, suggesting that violence leads to women's orgasms.

MAN. Do what?

WOMAN. Oh, you know. You know very well.

MAN. (*Getting angry*): Christ!

(*Man and Woman look at each other. Blue Light.*)

V.O. FLASHBACK—THREE YEARS AGO.

(*The Man strikes The Woman hard on the face; in slow motion, it almost looks like a caress. The Woman falls on the sofa. The Man drags on cigarette and then moves it toward Woman's face.*)

THE VOICE. "Case 103 continued. Subject increasingly resorted to violence against wife as an erotic stimulus for erec—"

What one notes in Vogel's heightened theatricality is an emphasis on multiple voices and positions of narration. The Voice and the Voice Over act as competing voices in Charlene's

head, playing out (embodying) the erotica script The Woman (Charlene) is writing. The voices also offer relevant comments about the actions occurring within the household. In Charlene's script, Voice Over is a sex worker. She is "at times bored with her job; at times emphatically overacting, trying to land a role in a legitimate film" (232).

One notes a kind of contest between The Voice and Voice-over, who speak as ideological embodiments of The Man and The Woman in dominant cultural values (and signal clues regarding gender stereotypes). When Charlene is threatened by Clyde's violence, Voice Over, believing that she is acting out "scripts," is also kidnapped by unknown men who treat her violently. Sporadically The Voice and Voice-over reflect on the behaviors of The Boy and The Girl, hinting that such stereotypical gender-coded behaviors will carry on into future generations. For instance, Voice Over in one sequence plays as the girl in a red light district where the voyeuristic boy (Calvin) pays a visit. Both The Voice and Voice Over have their words amplified through microphones. The Voice's values are embodied by The Man (Clyde), just as Voice Over incarnates the view of The Woman (Charlene). The opposing male and female outlooks, reified in The Voice and Voice Over, play out the interaction between Clyde and Charlene through the frame of mainstream discourse.

In a sense, Vogel illuminates the power of discourse in her use of The Voice and Voice Over, who not only passively play out Charlene's erotic scripts, but also actively take over Charlene's subjective stances. That is, instead of acting as an author, Charlene frequently enacts what The Voice/Voice Over commands.

THE VOICE. "So close, she can almost taste—"

V.O.

Smell. His. —

THE VOICE: "Sweat."

(A blue light fills the stage again. There is a rustling at the sliding glass window.

We see The Boy against the glass, watching. He stretches his arms against the frame.)

MAN. It will never be as good as it is with you.

THE VOICE. "CUT TO: INTERIOR. THE WOMAN closes her eyes."

(The Woman closes her eyes.)

THE VOICE. "CLOSE-UP on her lips as she kisses THE MAN, hard, on the mouth."

(The Woman sits by The Man and gently kisses him. They look at each other. Then they kiss again—a long, hard kiss, breathing each other in.)

V.O.

"VOICE-OVER: What are you doing, Charlene?"

THE VOICE. "THE MAN and THE WOMAN look at each other for a long time."

V.O.

"VOICE-OVER CONTINUED: This is not a movie, Charlene."

(Vogel 265)

In her use of film language, Charlene submits to The Voice like an actress abiding the demands of a director. In addition to Charlene and Clyde, Calvin The Boy also enacts The Voice's narration. What Vogel depicts is the susceptible aspect of the self, how external discourse infiltrates the individual's interior.

Through the verbal usage, body expression, interaction among characters and stage directions, etc., Vogel does everything to remind us that The Voice represents a patriarchal discourse while Voice-Over, the female erotica narration, is a repressed and submitted Other.

The Voice's various European dialects suggest the power and importance of authoritative sexologist figures, such as Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov (*Lolita*), nineteenth-century sexologist William Acton (*The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age and Advanced Life Considered in Their Physiological, Social and Moral Relations*) and Austro-German sexologist and psychiatrist Krafft-Ebing (*Psychopathia Sexualis*). Within such sexological discourse are blatant inaccuracies, for example, that male violence leads to female orgasm, and that women do not naturally have sexual drives—"love of home, children and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel" (249), etc. Such patriarchal ideologies permeate The Voice's utterances, suffocating any attempt for active female sexuality in Charlene's fictional erotic texts--as Clyde's (as a burglar) condescending remark goes: "I'm here to audition. To Give You. New Material. The E-Rot-icly UnEmployed... Write this up, Baby" (251).

Though featuring the "Voice-over" and herself as the active, controlling force in sex activities, Charlene's script, a hodgepodge of assimilated sexual expressions and patterns borrowed from the (patriarchal) status quo, however finally is shown to be beyond her own control. Both Charlene the author and "Voice-over," the impersonator of her characters, are subdued by male violence. The script finally follows the track of patriarchal discourse. Through this failure of "Charlene's scripts"—where Charlene is both an (striving-to-be) author and a constructed subject/characters—Vogel suggests that a simple inversion of the subject-object relation cannot work to make a new female-erotica (female subjectivity). What the play shows is the female's desire to be independent from the constructed subjectivity (defined by patriarchy) and how the female's effort may often only reinscribe the patriarchy; this is a problem frequently encountered by second-wave feminists, who seek the ascendance of women. *Hot 'n' Throbbing*

finally demonstrates the imposition of male dominance, the recycling of misogynist and pornographic discourses, and the assigned, subordinate position of the woman.

What one observes in *Hot 'n' Throbbing* is that Charlene's search for her/women's own plot finally reveals that female sexuality is inscribed within male perspectives. Charlene's desire to write registers women's desires to make the invisible (female sexuality) visible and to redefine their (sexual) identity on the patriarchal page. If in patriarchal discourse women are turned on (sexually) by violence, then it is Charlene's task to expose an alternative female sexuality that presumes an independent subjectivity. This attempt to override male/patriarchal imposition stands as Vogel's chief concern—the possibility of a clandestine feminine power that might overwrite “male discourse”—represented by The Voice, who intrudes upon the Voice Over's narration with passages from phallogocentric figures like D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Nabokov's Humbert Humbert.

The imposition and authority wielded by The Voice correspond to the ascendance enjoyed by the Western self. These patriarchal discourses⁷⁹ imply a totalitarian power that subjugates the Other (bringing it into the Same); they represent a tradition rooted in a linear, apocalyptic sense of time, a gendered/male time that devours the future/ Other and expands its (interior) territory (see full discussion in my chapter on David Henry Hwang), in a Lévinasian sense. Within this understanding of time, the Other is subdued by the epistemological mode that provides the Self with comprehension. For instance, female erotica is so foreign to Clyde that he cannot tell the difference between female erotica and porn. Dominant discourse by its nature tends to snuff out any counter voices; MAN: ...Talking involves disagreement. (258). The confrontation between (patriarchal) discourse and (female) narrative then involves a power struggle of sexual/erotic

⁷⁹ Lévinas has a totally opposite definition of the term “discourse.” Here, the term is used more in a Foucaultian sense.

languages, though the struggle is situated within the political, cultural, economical, and sexual impositions that a male-dominated society has placed on women. Distancing her work from traditional adult videos that are driven by male fantasies, Charlene intends a “women erotica” as an affirmation of female independence. This understanding of “erotica” implies a subject (male)/object (female) inversion.

WOMEN. Gyno Productions is a feminist film company dedicated to
producing women’s erotica.

MAN. Erotica is just a Swedish word for porn, Charlene. Just face what
you’re doing. Take pride in it. (261)

The difficulties involved in Charlene’s painstaking effort to generate “women’s tales” are twofold. First, Charlene exhausts the vocabularies for inventing narratives of female sexuality. If, as the French philosopher Michael Foucault points out, sexuality is a constantly changing concept activated by power relations, i.e., law, medicine, and pathology, then a deficiency of vocabularies may come as a corollary.⁸⁰ Female sexuality as a concomitant of feminine subjectivity owes much to feminist discourses, which are mostly evident in academic contexts. In other words, feminist discourse may be legitimate, but only in the field of academia. In the languages of popular cultural or daily life, feminist /female erotica utterances are unfamiliar (not housed in a male-dominated society). Therefore without a (popular/daily) discourse to proffer validated vocabularies and usages, it is not surprising that Charlene runs short of ways to express her efforts in female erotica. Such an attempt to import female porn into a culture where porn

⁸⁰ In his *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Michael Foucault points out that sexual discourse is a constantly changing concepts. For example, homosexuality appears to be one of the sexual practices when it was “transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43). So too were all other minor sexual perverts with some “strange baptismal names” given by sexologists in nineteenth century, such as Krafft-Ebing’s zoophiles and zoerasts. Foucault indicates that “[these] fine neames for heresies referred to a nature that was overlooked by the law, but not so neglectful of itself that it did not g on producing more species, even where there was no order to fit them into” (43).

means “male-perspective porn” also risks enhancing the existing connotation of that word (porn from a male perspective).

Secondly, throughout the play, Charlene has to repudiate, albeit without much success, that she is NOT writing *pornography* but something other. In a Lévinasian sense, it is always difficult, if not impossible, to fight against the thematized totality of discourse. Lévinas points out that: “...to know objectively is to know the historical, the *fact*, the *already happened*, the already passed by. The historical is not defined by the past; both the historical and the past are defined as themes of which one can speak. They are thematized precisely because they no longer speak” (TI, 65).

Those who defy patriarchal discourse, Charlene and her female erotica in this case, expose their inauthenticity and ambiguous state at the same time they speak. If the Other can make loud enough noises and win some approval, as seen with feminist movements, they only win over a limited habitat (i.e., within academic discourse). Given this sanctioned habitat, their acts then win some degree of recognition. In this case the Self-Other relationship is more balanced. On the other hand, if the Other does not make enough noise to gain any approval, it remains “othered” and what it says is absorbed into the Self’s (patriarchal) discourse, which is then only strengthened.

The thoroughly entrenched (and imperialist) nature of masculinist discourse appears throughout Vogel’s play. For instance, while Charlene is experiencing “writer’s block,” The Voice and Voice Over compete, offering different synonyms for “throbbing.” Voice-Over suggests “pulsating” and “heaving,” as The Voice offers “beating” and “battering” (243-44). The competition between dominant male discourse and female narrative foreshadows the later confrontation between Charlene and her ex-husband Clyde, as well as the interpolation of Voice Over’s script. When Clyde complains of his unlucky efforts in hiring a prostitute (because he

only had \$18.37), compassion (for old times' sake maybe) *pulsates* through Charlene and leads her to assert her sexual independence; she gives him sex as a gift. The thought that Charlene is always "prepared," always ready, however, infuriates Clyde, who finally beats and batters her.

In this light, female erotica may seek to function as a manifesto declaring female subjectivity, though it can also act as a reinforcement of patriarchal discourse. Therefore, as Charlene makes her way into this conundrum, it is hard to discern whether this double-ness can bring a promising future, trumpeting women's sexual independence, or, to the contrary, will only reinforce an obscene voyeuristic exploitation of the female body. In discussing Foucault's concept of subjectivity and its correlation to sexual acts, professor Ryan Claycomb concurs that "the individual becomes a subject when those deeds are confessed," however, "[although] the speech act endows the speaker with a notion of subjectivity, the subjectivity is created within a pre-existing matrix of power, and is already circumscribed by the moral codes" (109).

Following this line of thinking, male discourse functions as the matrix from which the female sexual narrative is drawn. While the speech act (the narrative) endows the speaker with subjectivity, female existence has already been circumscribed by patriarchal codes. Thus, Charlene's notion of erotica is already circumscribed by the concept of porn in male discourse. She emphatically denies this aspect of her writing: "I could kill your father for telling you kids a thing like that. I do not write *pornography*. There's a mile of difference between that and . . . *adult entertainment*" (238). With a voyeuristic son, and a daughter eager to sell her own body, Charlene experiences isolation and seems frustrated, trapped by the impositions a male discourse that her own efforts only reinforce.

The ending of the play confirms the problematic effort to promote a female erotica in face of male discourse. When Charlene agrees to have sex with him, Clyde undergoes mixed emotions. He is at first surprised and can hardly believe his luck. When Charlene goes to retrieve

her contraception, declaring that “A girl scout is always...prepared” (286), Clyde recalls the restraining order.⁸¹ He grows steadily angry, feeling that he is not in control. He then shoots Charlene, who, startled with seeing blood on her hands, hears Clyde shout: “I think women really get turned on to men in pain...” (289).

As this event plays out, there is a parallel demonstration of male-to-female violence occurring with *The Voice* and *Voice Over*. When *Voice Over*, a sex worker, thinks she is “acting out” Charlene’s movie script, *The Voice* interrupts her narration and demands a change in the script.

V. O.

That’s not what we rehearsed. . .

THE VOICE. Since when are movies made by screenwriters? Directors make the movies. Not some broad sitting on her ass. Improvise, can’t you? Your dialogue has gotta be as good as the dumb ass writer. . .

V.O.

But I thought—

THE VOICE. Do we pay you to think? You’re a professional, aren’t you?

Do you want the role or don’t you—we’re wasting overtime—

. . .

V.O.

(Bad acting)

“Please don’t hurt me...”

⁸¹ At this moment *The Voice* then announces a case in which Mr. C, a husband charged with a restraining order and thus unable to “arouse himself by normal stimuli” (286), was overcome “with a desire for ...’lust murder.’ Only after he had satisfied himself with violence on ex-wife’s body was subject apprehended.” (286).

THE VOICE. I'm not gonna hurt you, baby...I'm just gonna teach you a
little lesson. . .

. . .

V.O.

Shit! Wait a minute, guys—that really hurt. . . are you guys with
Gyno Productions?

THE VOICE. This is not your screenplay. (287)

The Voice then takes over The Man (Cylde) and The Woman's (Charlene) position, saying: "I'm beating you to teach you a lesson. . . Bitch. What makes you think, with your big fat butt and your cow thighs, that you're worth eighteen bucks..." (292). Unbuckling his belt, Clyde cries out, blaming Charlene as the one who has forced him to do this-- because "You should never—never gotten that restraining order—kicked me [Clyde] out of my own home! . . . A man's home is his Castle. . . What we do in here is... our fucking sacred business...Not the goddamn judge's!" (293). He then punches her in the stomach before he strangles her to death.

The ending, with Charlene subdued by Clyde's violence, obviously gives no hopeful expression of an independent female sexuality. Both "the author" (Charlene) and "the character" (Voice Over), existing as the projection of women, as a general social category, are simultaneously subdued by male discourse and male control. Such an ending seems to imply a failure of a female narrative to override/overwrite male discourse. If, as feminist Judith Butler suggests, female subjectivity lies in gender performance per se,⁸² women are here denied a chance for rehearsing their own script.

With this ending, does Vogel imply that there is no way out for women to find their own (sexual) narrative? Does *Hot 'n' Throbbing* finally only give a bleak and defeated outlook,

⁸² See Butler's *Gender Trouble* for reference.

giving over to misogyny and male assertion? I would argue that Vogel's play can be recommended on a number of fronts and that the playwright is not defeatist in attitude. The play does not give consent to the masculinist order depicted in the play but executes strategic resistance against masculinist norms. One positive for Vogel may be the assertion of a more accurate understanding of the female position and female identity. In this respect, the play can be seen as a clearing of the deck, tacitly asserting that second-wave feminism is antiquated and inadequate as a model for gender progress.

First of all, Charlene does not "invent" female narratives. Rather, she gleans her sources from the dominant discourse on porn. She listens to *The Voice*, who embodies the historical discourse on sexology, and the information bombarding the public via contemporary media, in hope that she can ferret out the secret truth of female sexuality. Her work

. . . documents the circulation of public discourses about gender and sexuality, as speeches and ideas overheard or adapted by the woman are incorporated into her text, and will presumably go on to animate other individuals who will view her film once it is finished. Here, a creative, nonviolent recursivity is offered as an alternative to the more deeply ingrained verbal habits and behaviors of the culture at large. (Richardson 690).

At the onset of the play and throughout the course of the action (until *The Voice* appropriates the script), both Charlene the writer and *Voice Over* emphasize that "she is in control" (235, 286). This reiteration, however, does not guarantee that an independent subject can automatically articulate itself (much like a repressed Other is not able to articulate itself by claiming itself to be in control). Likewise, female narrative/subjectivity does not validate itself just by self-assertion. A simple inversion of subject-object relation does not work, that is, the woman cannot seek to take the male position of dominance. An act (writing female erotica narrative) must be considered in its social and cultural contexts. In order for feminist movements or female erotica narrative to succeed, many cultural and political factors would need to change

(more a matter of structural change than individual rebellion). Clyde, for instance, is curious and inquires about Charlene's alleged confidence about this female sexual independence:

MAN. . . . So where do all these words come from?

WOMAN. I don't know. When I really get going, it's like a trance—it's not me writing at all. It's as if I just listen to voices and I'm taking dictation. . . .

MAN. Doesn't that spook you? I mean, whose voices are these? *Who's in control?*

VOICE OVER. But she was in control.

WOMAN. Well, they're the characters speaking, or the script itself. I mean, I know it's me, but I have to get into it. At first it spooked me a little. But now I know when I hear them, it's a good sign. *And I am in control.*

MAN. I used to think that porno flicks were all pictures and no words—

(my emphasis; Vogel 260)

Clyde's inquiry about "Who's in control" is crucial here. While Charlene thinks she is in control by having the law on her side (restraining order), Clyde barges in; while she thinks she is in control in offering to have sex with Clyde, Clyde flies into a rage and kills her. Similarly, the Voice-over thinks she is in control of her own body but is forced to act out a "patriarchal script" where men kidnap her body for their own use. Vogel's treatment of Charlene and the play's attitude toward her erotica suggest that female identity is more complicated than Charlene understands (that woman is not a pre-given but a construction), and that resistant efforts do not advance in a vacuum but are often authorized and appropriated by the constraining controls of a male-dominated culture.

Another positive may be found in Vogel's play, though it appears here more as an intimation than a realization. One key aspect of Vogel's writing is her fascination with desubjectification and a transformation that can follow (I will discuss this dynamic further in my analysis of *And Baby Makes 7*). Numerous instances in *Hot 'n' Throbbing* give the hint of this dynamic, as when Charlene experiences a self-division. In this moment we witness a blurring of the line between Charlene the scriptwriter and the "Voice-Over," a dominatrix in control in Charlene's script. While the multiple narrative can give evidence of a masculine discourse always at play, this blurring also points to the suspect aspect of any identity whole—it highlights the fluid nature of identity and the possibility of identity expansion. While Charlene herself may not experience desubjectification, this phenomenon may be suggested by Vogel's multi-narrative technique. With the use of multiple role-playing and myriad voices, the play often puts the audience in a confused and disoriented state, unable to determine coherent characters and motivated actions. This non-traditional form may point to a fluid or inchoate state of being, what Lévinas would term "existence without existents."

In some respect Charlene and Vogel share similarities, in that they both are scriptwriters. However, Vogel may herself be able to effect a destabilization that Charlene cannot. What we see in Vogel's dramatic strategy is a reluctance to simply reverse or flip the subject-object relationship existing in traditional gender patterns, for, as Savran reminds us, "inversion does not in itself fundamentally alter oppressive formations" (*A Queer* 192). Vogel can be understood to challenge the postures of the 1970s feminists, in following a tactic different from the outlook of the cultural feminists (lesbian-feminists, in particular) who attempted "to produce a uniquely woman-centered theater by recognizing that the celebration of formerly reviled characteristics simply inverts and thereby perpetuates patriarchal hierarchical structures" (Savran *A Queer* 192).

Rather than celebrating an affirmation of women's nature (and erotic desires), Vogel reveals the misguided thinking of Charlene's writing, as Vogel herself adopts a Brechtian and post-modernist approach. She refuses to give the presentation of an essential (female) subjectivity. She instead shows individuals enacting a social script, how women exist as a phenomenon constructed by different social and cultural forces. Vogel offers a complicated understanding of identity construction (one that might offer transformational possibilities through the process of desubjectification).

In the case of *Hot 'n' Throbbing*, Vogel situates Charlene as a woman victimized by domestic violence, who is eager to follow feminists' footsteps in search of an independent sexuality/subjectivity. However, Vogel admits that the existing definition of "women" stems from the cultural matrix. Instead of denying this and claiming a women-centered theatre, she forays into the Self's/male's epistemology and foregrounds its coercive aspects, highlighting its power and domination. In short, Vogel's method serves like an X-ray to expose the networking of patriarchal social structure.

While Charlene thinks she is writing from a women's point of view, she is unaware of her assimilation in patriarchal ideology. Vogel, on the other hand, is conscious that she is writing in a male-dominated arena which has been governed by a patriarchal perspective. Vogel, however works to smuggle in her tactics of resistance. For example, some male playwrights' works romanticize violence toward women; in Vogel's play Charlene and Clyde play out this basic romantic pattern, though Vogel's imitation of this pattern has the effect of parody. In a basic sense, Vogel exhibits the patterns of patriarchy and in the process shows its dangerous nature. Vogel's imitation of male playwrights acts as the necessary means for her disruption (her parody works to trouble male discourse).

Lynda Hart describes how the theatre has long been a public sphere for men. Traditionally women are only there to be seen: “Women have been spectacularized, cast as suffering heroines in many canonical playtexts”. Hart notes that “the history of theatre and even the etymology of the word have long rendered the woman playwright an oxymoron” (Qtd. in Savran *A Queer* 192). The theatron, is the place for viewing, a public sphere where men watch women, a validated location where the masculine Self bends the Other into its own visionary epistemology. To correct such a male-dominated sphere, Vogel parodizes its forms. She proceeds through mimicry. Savran explains:

. . . she imitates --with a difference—the strategies that male playwrights have long used. In some cases . . . *And Baby Makes Seven*, she deliberately appropriates and reimagines major patriarchal texts: *Othello*, *A Man for All Seasons*, and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, respectively. *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing*, meanwhile, represents a damning appraisal of the paradigmatically masculinist character of literary modernism (from D.H. Lawrence to Henry Miller, James Joyce to Vladimir Nabakov), as well as a critique of those playwrights, like John Patrick Shanley and David Mamet, whose work romanticizes violence against women. And Charlene herself practices a kind of male impersonation. In a play that is so clearly about the material effects of writing, it is no accident that her pornography represents a parodic redeployment of a genre on which men have long held a monopoly, much as Paula’s own playwriting represents a revision and repossession of a highly masculinized textual practice. (*A Queer* 191)

Vogel’s revelatory form of parody avoids the strategy of inversion advocated by the second-wave feminist movement. Her writing focuses on the coercions and constructions of a patriarchal order. Her parody may effect a kind of disturbance that threatens to make male assurance uneasy. And while this kind of transformation is not realized in *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing*, Vogel’s investigation of the construction of identity point to the phenomenon of a divided or dispersed self, the destabilization of the self that may provide a more healthy and vital female experience.

And Baby Makes 7

While *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing* demonstrates the imposition of dominant narratives, the multivocal and inventive style of the play points to a kind of fluid arena and effect. Vogel’s plays,

whether topically light or thematically heavy, often present a symbolic, theatrical arena in which an anti-social-gravity operates; her dramatic realm can be a kind of outer space where characters may be presented in a way that indicates an alternative to certain conditions determined by mainstream social notions, and can thus be transformed, viewed in a positive light. (Such a transformation is not depicted in Charlene's case, who remains constrained by male imposition, though the multivocal style of the play points to slippage). This effect and power comes from the characters' experiences involving—in Lévinas's terms—the alterity of the Other. It is through the submitting of themselves before the Other that new forms of subjectivity can be born.

This emphasis on theatricalizing a new subjectivity stands out as Vogel's chief strategy; she executes parody and non-linear, non-masculinist forms of characterization, and in so doing she presents narrative effects that illuminate what Lévinas calls "existence without existents" to re-imagine a subjectivity born from the Other. This new subjectivity abandons a virile Self, as Ruth exemplifies in *And Baby Makes 7*, and subjugates itself to the Other.

If *Hot 'n' Throbbing*, is more about the operation of patriarchal discourses and their treatment as parody, *And Baby Makes 7* gives hint of an overhauled modality, a shift in subjectivity, here understood as "growing up." In this play, Vogel makes the character Ruth grow up—transforming from a virile ego to a "feminine ego," in Lévinas's terms, which refers to a subject who bows/submits to the Other (different from submitting to male authority) like a mother surrenders herself to her baby. In *And Baby Makes 7*, Vogel again highlights desubjectification by having characters enacting their alter egos. The play dramatizes the unfixing of identity. Characters' completed subjectivities are broken into multiple narrative voices; hence, their (social) identities are blurred, and we observe a state that may be understood as "existence without existents."

In bringing about this dramatization of an unfixed state, the play illustrates a new order of time, which can be understood through a Lévinasian lens. In its release from linear time, *And Baby Makes 7* demonstrates the transformation at work which leads to “existence without existents.” Lingis mentions that “time” is the inner structure of subjectivity (in Lévinas EE, 11). Time exists because a subject/consciousness is born. In other words, a subject becomes a subject because of the awareness of “here and now.” (This formation comes because the existent is taking on existence as its own, its own attribute, and its own subjectivity. A rational subject then excludes other forms of existence, such as sleep, considering it as a suspension of subjectivity, instead of *another* mode of existence. It equates its own rationality with a certain mode of existence and excludes other modes of existence). Lingis writes:

The work of auto-positing, of contracting identity, of taking on existing as one’s own and thus becoming an existent, is also the very process that produces presence and the present. But then the present has the form not of a pure punctual line of separation between the infinite extension of the past and that of the future ... but of a pulse of existence that disconnects from the transmission of the past, closes in upon itself, and finds itself irrevocably and definitely held in all the absolute weight of its being. It has the form of an instant. (in Lévinas EE, 11)

So the subject inhabits the form of an instant, present. This subjectivity imagines the movement of time, from its own self-centered perspective, as an infinite extension of the past and future. This kind of time is only enclosed within the instant/subject. In other words, the traditional notion of (linear) time where the Future automatically flows into the Now is only an eternal repetition of “here and now,” the instants of the subject’s own imaginings. The subject is actually entrapped in the “stasis of time;” it “closes in upon itself and sustain itself.” It makes the universe intelligible by supplying reasons for everything (Lévinas EE, 8). In Lévinas’s perspective, this kind of subjectivity is termed rational, characterizing a virile ego (exhibiting a

patriarchal epistemology, subjugating the Other to itself).⁸³ As elaborated in my chapter on Hwang, Lévinas defines Now as this virile ego and Future as an unknown Other. Only when the subject bows to the Other—rather than seeking to control or objectify it--can the subject transform (or grow up).

This concept is key to understanding Vogel's deconstructionist methodology in *And Baby Makes 7*. Using various theatrical techniques as a vehicle to illustrate the freezing of time, so as to zoom in on the diorama of different cultural and social forces working on the individual, Vogel is unmaking the "subject" as traditionally defined. In this aspect, Vogel shares Lévinas's temporal concept (the recurrent here and now) by freezing the moment to expose the existent's (subject's) contingency and constructedness. In other words, she has theatre function as a means to freeze the present moment to illuminate the subject's repetition of "here and now."

In the play *And Baby Makes Seven*, I argue that a new subjectivity takes place, especially in the character Ruth, when the family is held hostage by the Other (baby). In embracing an inextricable responsibility, one that comes through a bowing of the Self, through a prioritization of the Other (the coming baby), a new subjectivity (of parenthood/ family) is born. In a sense, the family is maternalized, and new subjectivities are formed. This dynamic corresponds to Lévinas's proposal of "effemination" in *Totality and Infinity*. Attributing gender attributes to rationality/logos, Lévinas discusses the "effeminization" of the virile being, which is equivalent to the "feminization of the ethical" (Chanter *Feminist Interpretations*, 184). That is, instead of

⁸³ Philosophy and Women's Studies professor Debra Bergoffen describes such a subject in "The Subject of Love," a review article of *Family Values: Subjects Between Nature and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997) and *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001), by Philosophy professor Kelly Oliver: "The virile subject relates to the world and himself (it is sexed as male) through images of "ownness," ownership, and control. It loves what is fixed and fixes what it loves (women, truths) in stable, reliable identities. The virile subject is the figure of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, of Lacan's economy of sacrifice and of Sartre's sociality of war. It provides the blueprint for a cultural imaginary that severs nature from culture, and that images desire as a lack that can only be satisfied by domination (either benignly imaged as romantic love or baldly figured as conquest). (203)

following a masculine way of summoning the Other under the Self's subjugation, the Self should bow to the Other, like a mother devotes herself totally to the nurturing of a baby.⁸⁴

Lévinas genders the rational ego as male, as a virile ego. So as soon as an existent identifies the present, the here and now, as a Self hinged on the virile ego, it forms its own interior reality and rejects or forgets the fact that it is itself composed by other existents. In other words, it does not consider "existence without existents" as another mode of existence, as a stage it has been through, but rejects this state altogether (hence it rejects the Other). So Lévinas is proposing that the virile ego should recognize this other mode of existence (when itself relies on Others), which he terms as "effemination," as opposed to virile ego. Vogel's method of desubjectification (of Ruth) equates to this process of "effeminating virile ego." The analysis will specifically focus on Ruth's transformation from a "virile ego" to a new subject, who knows that a real Self is one that recognizes its dependence on others.

As noted in the Vogel anthology *The Baltimore Waltz and Other Plays* (1996), *And Baby Makes Seven* has been produced at least three times. It was first produced in January, 1984 by Theatre with Teeth at the 18th Street Playhouse in New York City, and was directed by Paula Vogel herself. The play was also produced in February, 1986 at Theatre Rhinoceros in San Francisco, with Kris Gannon as the director. Later it opened at the Lucille Lortel Theatre in New York City, in May, 1993, produced by the Circle Repertory Company with Derek McLane as the director. The play appears to have received a lukewarm reception, as critics generally considered

⁸⁴ I tend to look at the gendering terms, especially "feminine" and "effeminate" as metaphorical usages, as "terminological device," instead of "empirical sex and /or gender," in Donna Brody's words. Lévinas's view on women is controversial as his stance reveals a male-centered perspective. See essays in *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Lévinas* edited by Tina Chanter, including Tina Chanter's *Ethics of Eros*, Donna Brody's "Lévinas's Maternal Method from 'Time and the Other' Through *Otherwise Than Being: No Woman's Land?*" and Stella Sandford's "Masculine Mothers? Maternity in Lévinas and Plato" for more details. I also talk about Lévinas's view on feminine in the Conclusion Chapter.

the plot-line too thin to sustain a full-length play. In his review of the play's 1984's production,

Mel Gussow made this point clear:

As the play swerves between heightened reality and mania, everything flies askew. The author does not know where to end her Gothic nursery tale and appears to catch the actors, as well as the audience, off guard. In addition, Paula Vogel's production is shaky. . . Her brand of nightshade humor would seem to be very much in the developmental stage.
("Theatre: 'And Baby Makes 7.'")

In regard to the 1993 production, Gussow again writes an unfavorable review, noting the work as a regressive sign for the author.

'And Baby Makes Seven' operates on a single level and seems regressive, in several senses. The work has not markedly grown in the years since an earlier version, which was presented by the playwright under a pseudonym. ("Parents-to-Be Regress")

Since these three productions, the play gained another staging-- by Theatre 13 at the Dairy Center for the Arts in February of 2008. This production received a much warmer reception, with critic Juliet Wittman claiming "Mark Fischer's meticulous set and lighting support the action brilliantly, and the direction, by Steve Grad and Charlotte Brecht Munn, is sophisticated."

Notwithstanding Wittman's positive comment, Gussow was on to something with his remarks that the hectic household was "far too thin a thread on which to hang a full-length play" ("Parents-to-Be Regress"). Indeed, as a whimsical blurring of illusion and reality, the short play appears to be a hodgepodge of heavy themes. Despite the negative critical reception, the play nonetheless merits attention and an important place in Vogel's canon, as the play offers a provocative and perhaps profitable experience in the shaping of a new ethical relationship. Some critics claim that the play touches on the themes of lesbian motherhood, and the redefinition of familyhood, as in Gussow's words, "emotional alliances that transcend matters of sexual identity" ("Parents-to-Be Regress"); I would assert that the play is more significant for its envisioning of an overhauled and alternative female subjectivity.

Vogel's play here gives imaginative investigation to the ethical lens of the Self-Other relationship. With the trio of characters maternalized, these characters experience a new emotional alliance that leads them into a new definition of family. The transformation of subjectivity is accomplished through narrative means (storytelling), which gives expression to the matter of "growing up." While Gussow asserts that "[the] characters—real and imagined—have never grown up, and will never grow up, stultifying in a never-never land of their fervid dreams," Gussow identifies the character Ruth "as the most childlike member of the 'family'" ("Parents-to-Be Regress"). Though Ruth does show immaturity, I believe she advances in outlook. My analysis focuses on the transformation of Ruth and explores her transition from a Lévinasian "virile ego" to a "maternalized" parent. Through various staging and narrative strategies, Vogel de-subjectifies the Self, and in this effort we note the phenomenon of "existence without existents." It is in Ruth's realization of her responsibility towards the Other, including her own fragility and the necessity of Others for her survival, that she transforms herself and experiences a mature relation with Others; she becomes, in essence, a grownup.

And Baby Makes 7 is a complicated play, unconventional and whimsical. The play begins with a lesbian couple, the pregnant Anna and Ruth, awaiting the birth of a baby fathered by Anna's gay friend, Peter. As the audience waits along with the characters, they witness the increasingly involved and agitated relationship between the characters, since Peter chafes at the couple's imaginary games (they pretend to have children already). To appease Peter, Anna persuades Ruth to initiate "plots" to murder the imaginary kids: Henri and Orphan (enacted by Ruth) and Cecil (enacted by Anna). Vogel's work is thus heavy on role-playing and split identities.

With a "genius IQ," the imaginary Cecil is a precocious, mature, and suspicious leader. At the beginning of the play, when Henri asks where babies come from, he is able to address this

issue with sophisticated answers: “...a marvel of human technology”; a “thousands of millions of sperm are released and swim their way upstream to the egg.... It’s kind of a microcosm of Wall Street” (63). Partly because of his maturity and intellect, Cecil appears to be a big brother and an arbitrator between Henri and Orphan, who bicker often. With a spirit of camaraderie, he is alert and suspicious to any intention outside the “imaginary bro circle”—meaning the realm of the performing adults. He talks about giving up his belief in Heaven, and is never receptive to any placebo the adults proffer. Vigilant, he is the first one to detect the murder plan directed at them, and with profound observation he keenly points out how the adults are changing because of the baby. At the time he “has to go,” he is calmer than Peter the executioner (even though he “performs” a suicide), taking the story to a “tragic end” after an adult talk (men’s talk) with Peter.

Orphan (seven-year-old) is the boy raised by dogs. His emotions can become unbridled and his behaviors feral. Henri (eight-year-old) presents himself as the hero from the 1950s movie *The Red Balloon*. Ruth can move between these two roles and herself without giving any signals, a shift which drives Peter nuts. For instance, in scene four, where Henri and Orphan are fighting over a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich, Ruth initiates a schizophrenic fight within herself. However, there are moments heralding intimate (if not odd) familial ties, such as those of Peter and Ruth sharing Anna’s breasts, Peter and Ruth practicing the bathing of a plastic doll, etc.

The plot to murder the imaginary kids takes place early on in the play.

RUTH. Look, I want to get my last inch of fantasy out of them. I can’t just stop doing them, just like that. I’ll always be wondering: Will Cecil become a geophysicist? Will Henri go back to Paris? Will Orphan become fully socialized?

ANNA. So what are you proposing?

RUTH. We’re going to tidy up the plots. No loose ends dangling. Starting

tomorrow. We're going to kill them. One by one. First, Orphan. Then Henri. Cecil will be the last to go. (84)

Despite this declaration, however, we are not sure what death means here. Does it simply mean getting rid of pretend and the element of fancy? Or does this death mean the rehabilitation of their emotions through narration/storytelling? As we do not really see any of the children die, since they're "enacted" by the characters, their death per se are less important than the effect these imaginary deaths bring to bear.

When Henri tells Anna that he is the father of the baby, instead of Peter, we get the cue that Ruth is dealing with her sexuality and jealousy. While Anna is emotional, with a hair-trigger temper, Ruth asks Uncle Peter to take three kids to the zoo. Wittman reflects on the touching moment when one has to sever ties with one's past:

...the children seem to take on a life independent of their two creators, and it's touching when one or the other appears to sense impending oblivion. As it turns out, the first death is gruesome, the second lyrical and the third a parody of Cassius's suicide at the hand of his servant in *Julius Caesar*. (This is only one of many references to other works, from *Hamlet* to *Tea and Sympathy*, the 1950s film that attempted to deal with homosexuality without actually mentioning it). (Wittman)

Wittman here notes Vogel's propensity for thinking in "dramatic images." Indeed, the nonverbal affections and pranks demonstrate the internal struggles of sexualization, personal jealousy and new responsibility. The images produce an uncanny effect and help create the sense of the "stasis of time" and the suspension of Future (Other). Interestingly, this "stasis of time" in Vogel's play seems to herald the coming of Lévinasian time. It not only offers a chance to look into the reformation of new subjectivity, but also justifies its own timely exigency. As lesbian/gay parenthood is now new to society, this play offers an alternative definition of familyhood.

In a Lévinasian sense, the characters must break the self-referent present and embrace a future, in opposition to the constraints of a twentieth-century past/patriarchy, so that their new

subjectivities can be born. Only when the individual is aware of this weight and responsibility can it embrace alterity, the absolute Otherness that cannot be subsumed into the Same—the responsibility that comes from the Other (baby). This is also the moment when subjectivity breaks from its own “eternal repetition of instant” and looks toward the future, as entering a new relation.

In *And Baby Makes 7*, Anna and Ruth appear to be telling the stories of their imaginary children, but they are instead telling their own and/or each other’s life stories. By taking a third-person point-of-view, Vogel desubjectifies the lesbian couple, enabling them to explore an alternative sexuality, debate the possibilities of selfhood, and, with the coming of the baby, testify to past memories as the basis of a sustainable present. In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Italian philosopher Adrianna Cavarero proposes that the Self is narratable. Departing from Hannah Arendt’s notion of “who” someone is,⁸⁵ Cavarero argues that people desire to hear stories *about* themselves. It is through such stories told by other people that an individual’s uniqueness is achieved and its subjectivity sustained.

Ruth appears to grow more complicated throughout the imaginary game, revealing her convoluted and unbridled desires/personality. It is curious, however, that we never know what kind of person she is throughout the play. The performance of Henri and Orphan almost takes over her, and the multiplicities are difficult to comprehend. This complex modality parallels her social condition. In the triad, she is the most removed from the baby and most reluctant to get rid of the imaginary game. She clings most desperately to the storytelling exercise.

Awareness of this exigency pushes Ruth to employ a very virile strategy—she has Henri attempt to replace Peter as “the father.” This is her attempt at control. Throughout the imaginary

⁸⁵ In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt notes that despite philosophy setting out to describe the human condition with its similarities and differences, it shares or departs from other species (*what* human is)—that is, it cannot tangibly grasp the uniqueness of an individual (*who* someone is).

games, Henri stands out as a conspicuous representation of the complicated relationship among the three adults. The play unfolds with Henri inquiring “where does baby come from?” Such inquiries are not uncommon among children—they here bring out Ruth’s discomfort in envisioning Anna and Peter’s “making out the baby.” Therefore, despite Cecil’s use of scientific terminology, he insists on jumping to “the good part.” While this episode endeavors to set up an appropriate tone with regard to the role-play game, it illuminates Henri’s personality as a naughty boy who is curious about sex, and unfolds a new, alternative definition of familyhood, revealing Ruth’s awkward position in the household.

Both Ruth (the adult) and Henri (the eight-year-old) tend to see themselves as virile and capable subjects (desire to replace “the father”). This virile ego constitutes her/his selfhood and the ethical relationship with other people. In *The Gift of the Other: Lévinas and the Politics of Reproduction*, Lisa Guenther asserts that to be born is to forget one’s birth—that is, to forget and deny the times when we were dependent on the Others.⁸⁶ In other words, there are moments when I cannot recognize, or do not identify, the person I am as me, when he/she is dependent and/or frail, because to forget one’s birth would be to avoid the apparent humiliation of being born “between feces and urine.”⁸⁷ Whether I am three years old or seventy years old, my self-image remains the same (as a grownup); this is the virile Self, who seeks completion and autonomy.

In addition to Ruth’s aggressive maneuver to “replace the father,” her subjectivity, appearing largely constructed through sexuality, also conveys her “virile ego.” And while Henri insists on hearing “the good part,” his harassment of Peter (which apparently has been an issue) also points to his/her unruly personality/ sexuality.

⁸⁶ “[Perhaps] we cannot help but forget—the moment of birth hovers ambiguously on the edge between time and anarchy, selfhood and anonymity, existence and nothingness” (*The Gift of the Other* 1).

⁸⁷ This sentence is from St. Augustine. Guenther cited this from Beauvoir (Guenther 1).

ANNA. Henri!! What were you doing to Uncle Peter?

RUTH/HENRI. Nothing.

ANNA. Were you bothering him again?

RUTH/HENRI. No. I didn't do nothing!

ANNA:. Petey? Was Henri...bothering you again?

(Henri appeals to Peter silently.)

ANNA. Okay. Because you know, Henri, that we had that talk about no
g-r-o-p-i-n-g. Remember? Not even if Uncle Peter wants you to.

RUTH/HENRI. I would like to go to my room, please!

PETER. By all means, be our guest.

*(Ruth makes sounds of an offended Henri leaving the room, and slamming
the door...).* (70)

Given that sexuality serves as a significant marker of an independent and virile Selfhood, this aggression on Henri's part further reinforces a Selfhood of adult image. American poet Gertrude Stein asserts, "Nay we never know ourselves as other than young and grown men and women. When we know we are no longer to ourselves as children" (Qtd. in Gunther *The Gift of the Other* 1). That is, when we know ourselves as something other than a grownup, we are grownup to ourselves. Only when we recognize that there are moments when we are dependent on Others can we realize that we are finally grow up. For Guenther, this means we are prone to forget our birth, a time when our existence is tied to the Other. She interprets this in terms of understanding birth, time, and ethics:

If to forget birth is to feel oneself as the 'young and grown' origin of one's own existence, then to remember the givenness of birth would be both to feel oneself as the child of another and also to feel oneself as *other than a child*: as a self who, more than 'young and grown,' is both dependent on Others and responsible for them. (2)

Ruth is often more given to enacting Henri and Orphan, rather than enacting herself. Despite using aggressive methods to reclaim her territory in the house, Ruth remains ambiguous until her long confession before Peter after the baby is born. This confession indicates a moment of transformed subjectivity; a new Ruth who “remembers her birth”— a time when she abandons her virility and admits the necessity of depending on Others (i.e., Peter, and the baby).

RUTH. He looks just like you [Peter].

(Beat)

I guess Anna and I really started talking about having a child after our first year together. You know how it is, that first year...you spend every moment in side glances at your lover, learning this new alphabet—her face, her walk, her gestures. . . And I used to imagine that somewhere in the United States, there must be a pioneer geneticist, a woman in a lab coat we could go to, who would take some DNA from Anna and some DNA from me—and she’d combine us in a petri-dish in a little honeymoon culture. . . But finally I thought—well, I can always see my own face anytime I want to in the mirror. But I could see Anna’s face at birth, Anna in diapers. . . Well. I guess I didn’t think this all the way through. Peter. Oh. . . Is my face such an awful face?

(Ruth smiles at him.)

RUTH. No. it’s a very sweet face.

(She strokes his face)

I’m going to have to learn a new alphabet all over again. (117)

Here, Ruth chronicles her efforts to participate in the process of being a parent. Having Peter involved seems to be the last choice to which she finally acquiesces. (Her reluctance had fueled the previous pranks by Henri and Orphan). No longer virile and aggressive, Ruth, in this moment, finally admits to and accepts Peter's role. She understands that Peter is a necessary Other for them to form this family. By re-contextualizing the ordinary complexity seen among lovers (i.e., jealousy) to other human relationships—mother/son (i.e., Anna vs. Henri; Anna/Ruth vs. the coming baby), father/son (i.e., Peter vs. Cecil), friendships, etc.—Vogel depicts human relations beyond the constriction of the gender binary. A not uncommon question asked by kids, “Where does a baby come from?” leads to a reconsideration of Self-Other relationships. All in all, the baby is an ultimate Other.

Investigating the Lévinasian aspects of reproduction, Guenther elevates the birth event to an ethical level, arguing that we should return the gift (of birth) gained from the Other, to another Other-- everyone has the potential to be a Mother. In his book, *Otherwise than Being*, Lévinas compares ineradicable responsibility to the maternal body. For him, ethical responsibility demands the Self care for the Other without assimilating it. In the play, the coming baby is the Other tethering together the characters' existence. Not only Anna and Peter, the biological parents of the baby, but also Ruth, reconstruct their subjectivity throughout the process of gestation. In her article, “‘Like a Maternal Body’: Emmanuel Lévinas and the Motherhood of Moses,” Lisa Guenther emphasizes the word *like* and destabilizes the correlation between women and mothers, or “even between motherhood and responsibility” (119). She writes that it is “...an ethical imperative to bear the stranger as a nursing child, even if I have no reason and no capacity to bear him; the very homelessness and exposure of the Other speaks to me in the imperative” (120). Thus, the triad of the family (ethical relationship) per se is maternalized. They are not only the “host,” but are held hostage to the Other/baby without being able to extricate

themselves from the responsibility. As Cecil tells Henri: “They’re not themselves. Ever since that baby” (94). What Cecil indicates and heralds is in effect the enervation/effemination of the ego.

The title of the play can be interpreted in two ways and points to the theoretical and thematic implications of the work. Literally, it signifies the three adults, three imaginary children, and the coming baby, which makes 7 (people). It further emphasizes that the coming baby reorients the three people and reimagines the traditional notion of parenthood and familyhood. Therefore, the baby “makes” 7 and acts to bring about new subjectivities. As the play ends with the three gays forming a new family tie, determined by responsibility to the baby, we recognize the end of the “stasis of time”—the process of killing the imaginary kids—as Vogel depicts. This aspect of the play illuminates the Lévinasian temporal concept of “time,” a release from that of rational linearity, which only exists when the subject gains distance from its own identity determinants, subjugating itself before the Other—a moment when the Self experiences both the burden of responsibility and the difficulty of freedom.

The phenomenon of “existence without existents” in the play is demonstrated in the desubjectification of the characters (especially Ruth)—when Ruth moves back and forth through different self-created stories. She believes she grasps reality through telling stories. At times the plots of Orphan and Henri get so complicated that audiences fail to recognize Ruth as a complete subject. During such experiences one notes the “stasis of time;” the intricacies of Ruth’s emotions (jealousy, anxiety, and so on) and her desires for controlling are exposed through her enactment of the mischievous boys, the embodiments of her virile ego. It is through the process of the imaginary murders that Ruth learns to let go of some desires and compromises with some emotions, and it is not until her “adult” talk with Peter that a mature subject is shown in front of audience.

Arguing against an ontological epistemology, Lévinas's insight on the ethical understanding of time/death helps to analyze Vogel's *And Baby Makes 7* in light of the dialogue and relationship between Self/Other and death/rebirth dynamics. The effeminization/maternalization process of the characters also proposes a set of newly reified social relations that encourage the bearing of Others, whom one has "neither conceived nor given birth to" (Qtd. in Guenther "Like a Maternal Body" 120).

In conclusion, through the method of desubjectification Vogel presents a theatre of defamiliarization and successfully shows the phenomenon of "existence without existents." This technique allows audiences to reevaluate the characters' situation through a new lens, to reappraise women's existence within a masculine society and to reconsider their subjectivity. With Charlene's story Vogel not only demonstrates the limit of second-wave feminist's methods, but also offers a new possibility of disrupting patriarchal discourse in *Hot 'n' Throbbing*. In *And Baby Makes 7*, depicting the "growing up" process of Ruth, Vogel envisions an alternative subjectivity constructed with a new Self-Other relationship. These two earlier plays actually point to the later depiction of Li'l Bit's healthy transformation and new subjectivity in her best-known play *How I Learned to Drive*, where Li'l Bit, through an experience of "existence without existents," is allowed to conceive her *past chapter* (childhood abuses) as the Other—an indispensable part of her new subjectivity yet to be born.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ In his presentation of "How I Learned to Mourn: Assimilating Trauma in Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*," Graley Herren argues that "Li'l Bit's objective in re-enacting her trauma is not to punish her abuser so much as to find an acceptable narrative for assimilating the experience as a closed chapter from her past." See Herren, Graley. "How I Learned to Mourn: Assimilating Trauma in Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*."

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

This project, with its exploration of different cultural and social concerns, brings recent acclaimed dramatists of the American theatre into conversation with Lévinasian theory. As stated in the Introduction chapter, the perception of “who we are” in America has been very much challenged after September 11, 2001. This attack, however, also has presented us with a chance to reexamine who we are and how we see the world. This challenge involves how we view our own subjectivity, how we view our position in global politics, and how we see our relationship with the Other. The rapid pace of change, with unprecedented innovations in human communications, and the effects of an ever-increasing globalization, demand new visions and a new model of ethics in the spheres of international relations, interpersonal relations, as well as relations between humanity and nature (i.e., animals and the environment).

As an important venue for studying representations, theatre is uniquely suited to examining new visions and new perspectives. It engages the audience in timely reflection of political issues and ethics, offering a site for exploration of what Lévinas envisions— an encounter between Self and Other and its possible rippling effect, from interpersonal interactions to political involvement and activism. This project draws on both the disciplines of philosophy and theatre studies, and relates dramatic analysis to the global issues humankind faces in the 21st century. My study reveals the connection between theatre as a human representation and the fundamental basics of epistemology established in philosophical practice. Therefore scholars from philosophy, cultural studies and literature, etc. might find my work helpful in the ways the disciplines converse in different contexts in today’s world.

The project has examined four dramatists and four different aspects of ethical issues. Kushner chapter explores how the playwright frames his *Angels in America* by juxtaposing narratives—that of the grand historical and political level and that of the sensual, bodily and ephemeral level. Through this frame I explore the dialogism between politics and ethics in the play, arguing that Kushner’s implicit political view, his prophetic politics, stems from an ethics-oriented vision that is also evident in Lévinas’s ethical theory.

My chapter on Albee examines the ethical relationship between the human and non-human world and reflects on how the human constructs itself as a species at the expense of the non-human world. This ethical reflection has timely significance given the current struggles between economic development and environmental protection. The chapter focuses on the analysis of Albee’s play *The Goat*, shedding light on how the traditional equation between knowledge and being contributes to the human’s “interiority” that grants humans the right to objectify (which hence endangers our environment).

The Hwang chapter looks at racial issues through an epistemological lens. As an Asian-American playwright, Hwang in his plays explores race and the construction of identity. This chapter reveals that Hwang’s early non-racial work *The Sound of a Voice* can be read as a critical take on western epistemology. This play then can serve as a window into Hwang’s race plays in 90s, as well as his most recent play *Yellow Face*, a work that particularly demonstrates the limits of multiculturalism.

My Vogel chapter analyzes the Self-Other relationship in gender contexts. Vogel is noted for her dramatic technique of defamiliarization, which, together with her narratives, often desubjectify characters. This desubjectification gives focus to the cultural drives that work in the construction of subjectivity, as seen in such plays as *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing And Baby Makes 7*. This chapter argues that through such technique feminist theatre is able to represent women in a

way that challenges the status quo, and thus offer insight into a new female subjectivity beyond construction in patriarchal society.

In sum my work is based on the belief that these acclaimed American writers are all exploring issues that are crucial to the future of the country (and to the wider global order). These works help identify problems in contemporary culture, problems that come from exhausted ways of thinking and understanding the world. Each writer gives new images and languages for rethinking our human relationship. In this regard, the plays examined here may be seen as pointing the way forward. These plays fundamentally explore questions of relation, matters that deal with the primal understanding of Self and Other. And it is here where the work of Lévinas proves insightful. It may be thought that the playwrights and Lévinas are exploring similar questions and addressing similar problems—how to move forward in a new way that assures responsibility and care for the Other, for the different, for that which is beyond our knowledge.

While this project borrows many insightful ideas from Lévinas's theories, it also recognizes that there are limits to Lévinas's thoughts and challenges to his work. His writing has been highly influential in recent scholarship on ethical theory, yet there are issues that critics have brought into debate.

The most noticeable issue concerns his Other-centered altruism, which implies a total elimination of the ego and Self. One of the earliest criticisms of Lévinas's ethics is Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur's notion of ethics is more symmetrical than that of Lévinas, meaning, he believes that the I must hold the Other in esteem, as I hold myself in esteem. This relation demonstrates a reflexive structure in that I treat you equitably as I treat myself. Ricoeur believes that in order to make oneself open, one must in a certain sense belong to oneself (138). He goes as far as to suggest that Lévinas's ethics implies the "substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem" (221).

Following in this line of thinking, in *The Self after Postmodernity*, Calvin O. Schrag highlights the simultaneous affirmation and diminishment of the subject/Self. He points out that “one of the recurring ironies of postmodernity . . . is the impassioned call for em-powerment alongside requiems eulogizing the passing of the subject as speaker, author, actor - and pretty much in every sense conceivable” (61). Recently Oliver Davies has argued that altruism should come after a self-possessed Self. He writes: “Self-dispossessive virtue entails a prior state of self-possession if compassion is knowingly to put oneself at risk for the sake of the other” (8). He also points out that “the ‘hostage’ self suffers ‘the violence of alterity’ in ‘oppression,’ ‘persecution,’ ‘martyrdom’ and ‘obsession’” (31) prevents a Self from forming the subjectivity necessary to perform ethics, so “concrete and realized acts of compassion . . . are not enabled ‘through the condition of being hostage’” (189).

One notes that Lévinas’s theories have been widely applied in many disciplines, such as social science, medical ethics, and rhetorical studies. However, his work has been particularly questioned in the fields of feminist studies and animal studies, where Lévinas is criticized for retaining a male and human-dominated viewpoint, thus making his unconditional welcome not welcome for females and animals. In addition, Lévinas is problematic for legal studies; his priority on ethics in which responsibility is rendered active and infinite is in contrast to the theory and practice of law, where responsibility is rendered passive and finite. Lévinas’s limited knowledge of politics/law and his laconic discourses on related issues have thus sparked many controversial discussions.

The feminine does act in an important term in Lévinasian discourse because it is through the mother-baby relationship that Lévinas articulates his trope on the Self’s selfless devotion to an absolute Other. However, many feminist theorists note that in Lévinas’s texts, women’s existence is tied up with their ability to reproduce. This perspective strictly views women in a

traditional patriarchal sense, and thus renders women as the Other, a confinement that Beauvoir criticized. It seems that when Lévinas genders a virile existence and feminized moments, including death and eros, he only has “men” as “human” in mind. Women, on the other hand, are not included in the category of a “subject” but only designed for metaphorical use. In her introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Lévinas*, philosopher professor Tina Chanter points out that in Lévinas’s early work *Time and the Other* (1947) women are “the Other ‘par excellence,’” while later in his *Totality and Infinity* (1961) he recoups “the potentially transgressive aspect of women’s alterity uncovered in the 1940s” (17).

Despite these concerns, Lévinas’s notion of virile existence, effemination as an alternative ethical relationship, and bowing before the Other for the Self’s ethical experience still prove very helpful in my analysis of Vogel’s plays. As Chanter reasons that to “read Lévinas well would perhaps be not only to read his texts faithfully; it would be to turn away from his texts. . . and to ask what they foreclose” (6).

The controversy of how women function or exist in Lévinas’s texts is paralleled in his regard for animals. Just as feminists object that in Lévinas’s texts women are excluded from the face-to-face encounter, animal advocates claim that animals do not enjoy unconditional hospitality either. The European philosophical tradition does not consider animals as beings that possess language, reason and ethics. Yet, to counter these views, when Lévinas sees Bobby the dog, he did at first try not to look at Bobby through an anthropocentric lens—he tried not to allegorize or metaphorize him. Because he recognized that Bobby had done something the Nazi captors did not— Bobby recognized the humanity of Lévinas and other detainees—Bobby himself was an irreducible being. That is, while Lévinas tried not to look at Bobby as “a mere representative of his kind” (Herron 468), he nevertheless went back to a traditional mode of

thinking after the moment passed: Bobby was just a dog that “he is “without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives” (152).

In “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” Jacques Derrida recognizes this problem that Lévinas shares with many other European philosophers:

discourses [on the animal] are sound and profound, but everything goes on as if they themselves had never been looked at, and especially not naked, by an animal that addressed them ... as though this troubling experience had not been theoretically registered, supposing that they had experienced it at all, at the precise moment when they made of the animal a theorem, something seen and not seeing. The experience of the seeing animal, the animal that looks at them, has not been taken into account in the philosophical or theoretical architecture of their discourse. (383)

This see/seen complex indicates a self-centered epistemology. While this complex is also recognized in the domain of Lévinas’s theories as problematic, the animal Other for Lévinas still does not find a position of welcome and obligation.

Besides being criticized for his male-dominated and anthropocentric perspective (for adopting metaphorical tropes on the feminine and animals), Lévinas has been challenged for his view on law and politics. Law professor Marinos Diamantides in *Lévinas, Law, Politics* points out that Lévinas’s weakness on law and politics stems from his limited understanding of these fields. First of all, the idea of The Third—the third person that enters into the face-to-face relation—demands Lévinas to ponder on “justice as measurement and comparison of responsibility” (17). Because Lévinas does not delve deeply enough into the relationship between law and ethics, his texts express a limited view of the law, seeing law “as a positive, codified, rule-bound structure within the state” (17). Secondly, Lévinas does not solve his contradictory definition of ethics and politics. On the one hand, in ethics he claims responsibility is asymmetrical and infinite, and is incommensurable with the politics. On the other hand, responsibility needs the subject to “definite, finite, rules and moreover is subordinated to the

pragmatic demands of the state and social policy” (17). Lévinas then confines politics within the domain of the state and institutions, leaving the paradox unresolved. Diamantides remarks that Lévinas’s failure to resolve the ethics and the politics is depressing because it “renders Lévinas’s theme of one’s infinite responsibility for the Other vulnerable to romanticisation” and “implicitly renders the institution of legality by the state as a regrettable necessity that, in turn, forecloses the possibility of an ethical critique of state law and politics that would go beyond either negation or mere deconstruction” (17).

Gillian Rose also shares the view of Diamantides, believing that Lévinas’s writings presents an incompatibility between ethics and politics. In *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*, Rose points out that the absence of a deep exploration on law, institutions and idealities in Lévinas’s texts makes his thoughts problematic. She thinks Lévinas holds a position representative of post-modernism, and fails to “conceive a ground of meaning beneath the individual and the state, the ethical life and political institutions” (Bergo 258).

While both Diamantides and Rose point out the weakness in Lévinas’s understanding of law and politics, his notion of bodily sensation as the origin of ethics, of proximity and of the third can still prove helpful in considering human relations and political systems. Other scholars such as Desmond Monderson contextualize Lévinas’s ethics in empirical juridical experience by exploring “why should we care for others? And how much?” (Diamantides 145) and prove that Lévinas’s ethical ideas are insightful in improving the system of law/regulations. In addition, professor Simon Critchley proposes “a formal theory of political activity inspired by Lévinas’s ethics” (Bergo 241). Elaborating on Jacques Derrida’s major works, Critchley points out Lévinas’s impact on Derrida and Lévinas’s notion that ethics should be understood as the interruption of a discursive practice. He then argues that Derrida’s philosophy rests upon an ethical imperative.

While many critics from various disciplines challenge Lévinas's ethical thinking, his theories nonetheless prove to be insightful, especially given the economic, environmental and gender issues facing humans today. His refusal to allow the total subjugation of the Other by the Self serves to reins in an over-weening individualism, to promote a reconsideration of the Self-Other relationship and the construction of self-ness. His notion of bodily sensation as the origin of ethics also signals a productive way of thinking, checking abstract and universalized understandings of law and politics. Further, his emphasis on a face-to-face encounter spurs a new ethical practice, from microcosm to macrocosm, and from individual to collective (politics). Lévinas emphasizes the rippling effect of ethics, where the face to face encounter serves to inform more complex and institutionalized social relations. In final respects, Lévinas challenges the present-day world to consider its aims and its trajectory. He puts forward a call to engage the Other with responsibility and to behave toward the Other out of obligation. His insights show that theatre can transcend the limitations of the recurrent Now/Self and is able to lead us past "what we've left behind" and on to what we are "dreaming ahead" (*Perestroika*, 144), thus opening up a future for the exploration of a wisdom of love toward the Other.

While Lévinas's ethical theory can be inspirational and challenging to many aspects of Western rationality, his work is highly complex and not without complications in its proposed self-other relationship. Critics have noted the difficulties with Lévinas, commonly targeting his perspective on female subjectivity, his abnegation of the self, and his rather ambiguous treatment of politics and pragmatic decision-making.

In *Time and the Other*, Lévinas suggests that "female" is alterity itself. She is outside of the light/knowledge, and is directly linked to erotic experience. Lévinas analyzes the phenomenology of voluptuousness through the "alterity of feminine," which he describes as elusive from the grasp of light. Problems arise when we consider the methodology of

phenomenology. Donna Brody, in her “Lévinas’s Maternal Method from ‘Time and the Other’ through Otherwise Than Being: No Woman’s Land?,” asks from whose perspective is the phenomenon being described? Can the female, as the study object of the phenomenon, also maintain the subjective stance? Can female readers identify themselves as the “alterity” that even they themselves cannot understand? The fact that Lévinas fails to take female readers into consideration points to the weakness of his theory, indicative of how his discourse situates women as the Other. While Lévinas explains that his analysis “is not phenomenological to the end” (TOAE, 78), feminist criticism tends to view this statement as too thin, unable to explain away his ignorance of women. It is of crucial importance in such discourse, where the female is employed for metaphorical usage, for Lévinas to connect, reconcile and differentiate between the metaphorical female and women in reality. Such a distinction is a way to avoid inscribing masculinist values in his idea of the feminine other.

Tina Chanter, however, proposes an “infinitely generous” feminist reading of Lévinas in the hope that one might “take its cue from the sense in which maternity hesitates between the saying and the said” (*Time, Death, and the Feminine* 259). Chanter holds that Lévinas’s philosophy employs the feminine as a strategy, one that he does not completely think through. While she reminds us that the feminine still “remains captive to its preparatory role in Lévinas’s work” (259), Chanter shifts this criticism from the perspective of ontological women to a rethinking of an alternative subjectivity that does not function in thematic or representative terms. She argues that Lévinas’s notion of sensibility operates against a tradition of representation that subsumes the Other into the Same and absolves the distinction between mind and body. She points out that it is through renouncing intentionality that sensibility signifies maternity (244), as sensibility opens up an ethical relationship with the Other; such a relationship is an analogue

of maternity that helps nurture not only a new self-other relationship, but also envisions a new subjectivity for self-ness.

In addition, Lévinas is constantly challenged on his emphasis on self-abnegation, the subjugating of the self totally to the Other. The advantage of such drastic renunciation of the self (which attempts to subsume the Other into its own epistemological realm) ensures, for Lévinas, a sound ethics between self and the Other. By positing the self as an entity constructed after its primary relation with the Other, Lévinas seems to claim that a limitation on the self may thus diminish the possible violence that the self may enact upon the Other—it ensures a more hospitable relationship between self and the Other. The disadvantage of this proposition, as criticism generally questions, lies in the impractical aspect of altruism in reality. The emphasis on the priority of the Other has incurred criticism that is skeptical of total altruism, which implies a nihilism of the self's subjectivity. Can a person exist without any identity position that labels and defines him or herself? Further, is a self-dispossessed hostage aware of his/her responsibility toward the Other, as Lévinas proposes? A proposal for a self always put at the mercy of the Other risks self-loathing and self-hatred; such a self may avoid a violence done to the Other, but is more likely to approach an abandoning and the taking up of the weight of his/her own life. In other words, an unsure self is not capable of bearing the responsibility for itself and for the Other. Søren Kierkegaard, for instance, argues the “as yourself” component in the Christian love commandment “both implies the legitimacy of self-love and puts legitimate limits on self-sacrifice in response to the command” (Qtd. in Ferreira 444). He argues that “as yourself” requires the fulfillment of self-love, and without a you and an I there is not love (Ferreira 444). In other words, if a self does not know how to properly love himself/herself, he would not know how to love his/her neighbor.

While such questioning is certainly valid, I think a focus on the primary order of ethics may make Lévinas's theory less confusing. While prioritizing the Other, Lévinas, I believe, is not necessarily opposed to any identity markers. These markers instead should be seen as coming after the ethical relationship is set. This stance urges a primary order of ethics to come before identity (the label and markers). In other words, a priority of the Other does not necessitate a diminishing of a self. Instead, it could act to promote the rethinking of a new subjectivity, and hopefully a catalyst for consideration of a new interpersonal, political and inter-national relationship—in short, a rearrangement of relationship from microcosm to macrocosm. M. Jamie Ferreira, in his “‘Total Altruism’ in Lévinas’s ‘Ethics of the Welcome,’” argues that Lévinas’s ethics “supports an active and maintained ethical self, which, despite his emphasis on ‘dissymmetry’ in face-to-face relation, accounts for his affirmations of both equality and justice” (445). He traces the idea of host and hostage in Lévinas’s discourses and argues that “[the] language of ‘hostage’ that comes in between is not a shift away from his earlier language of hospitality; it is an elaboration of it” (445). In other words, the later concept of self as “hostage” is not a substitute for the previous notion of “host.” The two notions should be considered as working in sympathy and as correctives to each other.

One should understand that Lévinas’s ethical theory is not solely an aspirational model that urges a new relationship between self and other. His notion that the Other comes before the self is indicative of Lévinas belief in the way that reality actually functions. The existence of the Other foregrounds the self-making process, instead of the other way around. In other words, Lévinas is not just trying to give a model of ethical understanding that he thinks should be followed. His ethical theory is not a set of morally or ethically sensitive suggestions (responding to the violence the self may impose upon the Other). His ethical theory is rather a reminder of the

way things are, issuing from a genuine phenomenological account of reality. For him, ethical relations actually are a constituent of reality, not an ideal set of aims or targets.

Why then, if reality is really constructed this way and individuals really do come into being as Lévinas understands, is there still domination, power, and injustice? I think we could say that even if the nature of reality is constructed as Lévinas holds, it does not necessarily follow that individuals in a strictly deterministic way must abide by this rule. Therefore I think Lévinas's theory functions more as a reminder and a corrective to an epistemology that he thinks gone awry. It is in this dynamic of the nature of reality and the human's account of reality that lies the internal tension of Lévinas's ethical theory. Lévinas diagnoses a kind of human epistemology that hinges on an aggressive self, and that twists the ethical relationship. In some respects, his understanding of the ethical relationship serves as a more fundamental component of the self-other relation.

Applying Lévinas's theory to practicality, such as politics, is another challenge, as politics involves the third, the institutionalization of law and hence (the condemned) totalizing effect. Ethics is the generative source of responsibility between the self and Other, while politics comes with the third and the pragmatic need to make decisions; politics in some ways always short-changes the ethical. Politics can never get the ethical perfect, and any attempt to assert a totalizing political vision or ideology will always compromise the ethical. While we still live in a world that needs political acts and political decisions, Lévinas is valuable because he suggests that ethics can act as a counter force to a totalizing politics. That said, if politics must always short-change the ethical, then the ethical always short-changes the political as well. The case in point is the rippling effect of ethics. Ethics on the individual level can pose as a counterforce to the macrocosm (the grand narrative of politics). Yet, the ethical cannot ever fully be inscribed in a political system. Lévinas's notion of "face" serves as a constant reminder to emphasize the

importance of ethics—this aspect functions as something to chide and inspire the political, even as the political must always be limited.

While ethics can serve as a check on any kind of totalizing politics, however, it is still necessary in the world to have politics and to make decisions that involve competing interests and parties. Can Levinas be used in situations when people want different things? Is he at all helpful in the actual practice of politics and conflict resolution? In addition to an overhauled rethinking of epistemology and subjectivity, which is fundamental yet may appear overly abstract, Lévinas views may influence political practice. Desmond Manderson's article "Here I am: Illuminating and Delimiting Responsibility," gives a good example of how a prioritization of ethics can be employed in jurisprudential practice—in effect, embedding an ethical DNA in the political occasion and realizing ethics as the first philosophy. Manderson describes how Lévinas's idea of proximity connects to "the High Court of Australia's explanation of the parameters of the duty of care" (Manderson in Diamantides 146). What Lévinas means by proximity is "something fundamental to who we are and why we have a responsibility to others; something which furthermore cannot be reduced to logic or knowledge or rules. Proximity is an experience, emotional and bodily, and not an idea"(146). And this ethical idea of proximity has been put into practice by the influential judgments of Justice William Deane. Manderson's article shows that, while politics short-changes ethics, the ethical imperative can also function as a shaping force to foreground the ethical concerns in jurisprudence. While the third forecloses the asymmetrical self-other relationship (self bows totally to the Other), it is possible for the institution/politics to prioritize "proximity" before any set of codified rules. Such an outlook necessitates that politics and decision-making will always be contingent, always messy and complicated.

Given the work already accomplished in the dissertation, I would expand my research on Lévinas and literature for future investigation and analysis. This includes paying attention to the criticism on Lévinas, including that regarding his understanding of representation (art). Despite that feminist criticism holds that Lévinas eliminates female subjectivity in his discourse, in my analysis of Vogel's works, Lévinas's vision of a subjectivity constructed with the priority of ethics may yet prove to be helpful. The way that Lévinas "re-inscribes" patriarchal discourse in the notion of feminine, a point often criticized, actually manifests the existence of *ontological* women. Feminist critics are correct in pointing out that women are trapped in Lévinas's discourse as the Other. However, in a sense Lévinas also releases women from this *ontology* (where she was othered) by reimagining a metaphorical feminine. This femininity enervates the virile ego, the egoistical attitude which is not exclusive to men, and opens up a new subjectivity which, by subjugating itself before the Other, fulfills a new self. In *And Baby Makes 7*, one can see a metaphorical employment of motherhood, where the self bows toward to the Other, a move that can be read as a maternalization of subjectivity, one that reflects the overhauled female subjectivity that Vogel is exploring.

In addition to bringing attitudes critical of Lévinas into the dissertation's play analyses, I would also highlight the general problem of bringing Lévinas's theories into practical application, especially as I discuss certain problems facing the 21st century. For example, I would note the problems in applying Lévinas to political discussions, such as the recent conference on climate change (i.e., 2009 Climate Conference in Copenhagen), which highlighted the debate between various understandings of the relationship between the human and non-human (environment). That said, and while it is difficult to connect politics to the realm of ethics, as Lévinas appears to propose, an appeal to ethics, I believe, can inform the political debate in the case of ecological concerns. Lévinas's assertion that the self (human) only comes after its relations with the Other

(environment) may prove a guiding insight for such conferences. This ethical modification also calls for a philosophical change in the way humans view their self-constructedness: Lévinas's belief that the self only comes after the Other, as a given, offers a model for understanding the primacy of the environment, prior to the assertions of the ego/self.

In such conferences, however, there are often conflicts between industry and green groups because the two hold drastically opposing stances, as industry aims for endless manufacturing while green groups hope to stop the emission of CO₂. Lévinas here is helpful in demonstrating that human existence must rely on the sustainability of resources, a protection of the environment over profit, which is a greedy projection of human success. Such a success, however, is built on the exploitation of the natural environment (and cannot be measured from the perspective of the environment) In "Ethics and Trauma: Lévinas, Feminism, and Deep Ecology," Roger S. Gottlieb points out that "The face of the other is not an empirical face," an observation that particularly relates to the eco crisis humans encounter today. The progress of industry is the representation of a modern epistemology, which may take on the forms of science, philosophy, technology or rationality, outlooks that take root in positivism and essentially reduce the Other (environment) in service to a human interest. Lévinas's notion that we must respond to the Other's call gives special insight here, because "only by responding can we give up our attitude of domination; but knowledge of the world always involves a comportment of domination" (Gottlieb). A conference like this in Copenhagen may be understood as a respond to the nature's call, demonstrating how such efforts might invoke the ethical (even as debate may continue over how to practically decide public policies and practical initiatives).

The relationship between Lévinas and art is a complicated story. First of all, it is known that Lévinas is hostile toward representation. Lévinas writes negatively about literature and art. For him such a representation is plastic and idolatrous, one that will betray the Face of the Other

by risking the imposition of a dominant principle. In sum, the aesthetic is an evasion of responsibility that the Self holds toward the Other. However, it is not to be forgotten that, while Lévinas's writings almost exclusively relate to ethics, he in many places explains his views by referencing works of literature. The thread of literary influence plays centrally in Lévinas's ethical discourse. Jill Robbins points out that the notion of language or signification itself is a precarious aspect in his discourse because it resists "description in terms of our ordinary understanding of signification as a reference to something else" (Kosky rev. of *Altered Reading* 519). Exploring Lévinas's hostility toward signification, Robbins analyzes Lévinas hostility to art, seeking possibilities of a literary or performative dimension that might address (and lessen) his opposition to representation across the board. She suggests that, because Lévinas's ethics has structural similarities with aesthetic experiences (with many literary authors), "the work of art [may] give access to the ethical" (76).

So can one still use Lévinas to discuss art, theatre and representation. In his "Sublime Trauma: The Violence of Ethical Encounter," Leslie A. Wade suggests that the violence represented on stage actually functions as a destabilization of a sure ego, one effect paralleling the encounter between self and the Other. In other words, violence serves as an analogue of ethics that captures a collapsing moment of the self. While this moment is likely to be represented as trauma, it brings salutary effects. In a nutshell, there are ways of doing art that combat egoist assertion and the kind of art that functions in an arrogant way as an expression of "the said." Lévinas argues that "the said" is "the birth place of ontology" (OB, 42), so art that represent egoist assertion is not likely to show any modality beyond its own cognition. What invites investigation is an art that speaks to the "face" outside the realm of epistemology, a kind of engagement and encounter which highlights the exchange of "the saying" over the closure of "the said."

Different theatrical styles and devices of the plays analyzed in the dissertation may in fact invoke moments of the “face,” giving expression to a challenge of authority and the ego in a western outlook. In Vogel’s *Hot ‘n’ Throbbing*, for instance, The Voice functions as the dominant ego that imposes its discourse on the Voice Over (the Other). With a real embodiment of “the said” we might see how the Self asserts itself in an authoritarian way, how the Other (feminine narrative) is interpolated and kidnapped, and how the process is rendered natural and valid. The fact that the plot itself is so familiar in the media helps build its validity as well as numb our sympathetic and empathetic responses. The theatrical devices, however, provoke a reexamination of its legitimacy through the “representation” of the repressed “saying” on stage—the feminine sexuality that has no mode of utterance (within patriarchal discourse).

Kushner’s work features characters returning from the past and often renders multiple actions onstage in split focus. The presentation of the recurrent “priors” (ancestors) breaks up the illusion of an isolated and powerful ego; this approach not only demonstrates the significance of the “past” but also shatters the priority of the “present” (self) and its supposed grasp on the future to come (as in Lévinas’s alternative understanding of time). In addition, the designation of the encounter of Prior and Harper in their dream/illusion also debunks the heavy mask of identity and a fixed reality. This move does not suggest that we do not need identity, or that identity is an absolute, bad thing, but that identity is not the only thing that necessarily connects people. Suffering and trauma may be a stronger glue that holds people together, as they reveal “proximity” in a Lévinasian sense—we identify our humanity through identifying the other’s suffering and trauma. Kushner’s stylistics and non-realistic approaches may help highlight this feature.

Even a realistic play, such as *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia*, can still create a disturbance or an interruption in western knowing and confidence. The representation of the goat itself is very

symbolic—Sylvia makes her presence evident as a funny smell described by Stevie, and later she appears in the play’s coda as a carcass. This symbolic rendering of the human-other highlights a kind of human arrogance—as Derrida describes in his analysis of the word “animal” (Qtd. in Chaudhuri “(De)Facing the Animals” 10) The smell and the carcass (food) indicate a primary reduction. Stevie’s anger, her breaking of plates, vases and bowls, as well as her killing the goat, however, point to moments of crisis, moments that are themselves performances of the limit of humanity. In an epistemology where the Self-ness of humanity requires a vehement or even violent assertion to ground itself, the dramatic destabilization of the self-other encounter can produce effects of eruption and dizziness onstage.

In short, theatrical forms and different theatrical techniques may help work out and demonstrate problems that concern Lévinas. Certain theatrical techniques are likely to help create an art that produces different or opposing meanings (rather than egoist manifestations), and can hence boost a productive dialogue between “the said” and “the saying.”

Given the criticism and problems with Lévinas, in what way does Lévinas still appear useful and valuable? Firstly, I admit that the dissertation might reduce its reliance on Lévinas *per se*. I might situate Lévinas’s work in its historical context in order to better understand how his writings address particular issues in a particular time. Besides, I might use Lévinas not as any kind of final authority on such matters or issues, but as a guide, as a way to point out and understand crucial problems and questions for contemporary humanity. That is to say that Lévinas should be used as a helpful catalyst for reconsidering problems, instead of being the avatar of final solutions or answers.

Given the problems and limitations of his theory, Lévinas’s sanctification of the Other above all, however, is still inspiring to today’s world. While this outlook can cause problems and difficulties in its application, Lévinas’s work seeks to disallow any kind of future horror that

might eradicate the other in service to an arrogant self (such as the Holocaust). Therefore, this outlook serves as the ultimate check on whatever politics one follows or wishes to advance, as well as to a postmodern relativism or a postmodern reluctance to commit to any ethical position. All in all, for Lévinas, ethics is the foundation.

Finally, Lévinas can be applauded for his efforts to assert ethics in such a way that it exists prior to any particular identity (and thus precedes identity politics and power plays). Ethics is not thus based on a specific connection or proximity. Again, ethics is prior to the self. While this view can be problematic in its application to particular instances, it has the value of not basing ethics on any particular identity or identity relation. What this affords is a way of considering ethics prior to specific cultural contestations—that is, something is there, as a beacon or a guidance, that cannot be given over to contingency, that cannot be dismissed just because any particular interest, group, or identity has the power to enact its will. This new definition of ethics functions as a safeguard that is not at the mercy of the powerful.

Tom Burvill, in his “‘Politics Begins as Ethics’: Lévinasian Ethics and Australian Performance Concerning Refugees,” offers a case in point. Criticizing the Australian government’s refusal to honor its responsibility and to provide unqualified hospitality, he uses Lévinas’s concepts to explore the rich and varied responses of Australian theatre to this crisis. Burvill suggests that the theatrical phenomenon itself is broadly the practice of ethics. In this light, theatre functions as a beacon, one that produces an affective rather than an ideological transformation. In this instance one sees that theatre can prove to be an “ethical mode of embodied discourse” (233), a medium that highlights “the saying” over “the said.”

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