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Beyond History in History: Historiographic Threads in Foucault and Lévinas

The expression "beyond history in history" paraphrases the title of a lesson presented by Emmanuel Lévinas in 1988 before the 29th Colloquium of Jewish Intellectuals and later published in *The New Talmudic Readings* (1999) as "Beyond the State in the State." The aporetic combination of the "beyond" and the "in," of the unlimited and the limited, of interiority and exteriority, of immanence and transcendence, indicates the complexity of Lévinas's ethico-political program that aspires to preserve ethical non-spaces (or "null-sites"[1]) in the interstices of politics. Equally complex is the Lévinasian treatment of another totality—the totality of history. Yet, reading Lévinas's oeuvres, one is left with the impression that the focal point of his philosophy is a purely transcendental movement "beyond" history at the expense of (not through) the immanence of historical interiority.

The act of balancing the forces of transcendence and immanence in the Lévinasian theorization of history requires something like a supplement which Michel Foucault's rethinking of historiography readily delivers. Concomitantly, an explication of the consequences of the Foucaultian "revolution" in the field of historiography might

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1. Lévinas puts to use the peculiar expressions "null-site" and "no-ground" (*non-lieu*) whenever he wishes to mark the condition of absolute alterity on "the hither side" of being, of the Same, of One, or of space. These expressions betoken the movement into time(s) without space, in which (and in which alone) the encounter with the absolute otherness is conceivable.

greatly benefit from Lévinas's conceptualization of history alongside his transhistorical demand for justice. The juxtaposition of the two theories is especially warranted in light of the common front on which they fight against the totalizing power of what Foucault calls "traditional" history. A further overlap will become visible when the Foucaultian axes of the genealogical "event" and the archive are grafted onto the Lévinasian preoccupation with eschatology and the "saying without the said," respectively. Finally, the establishment of this common ground will facilitate a virtual dialogue centered on the incompatibility of historiography, speech, and justice in Lévinas and Foucault.

In the introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault voices a number of objections to what he calls "traditional history" and, through this critique, lays the groundwork for a drastically different archaeological method. According to this argument, traditional history inscribes itself into a stable structure, underlying the minor fluctuations and discontinuities of events and providing "a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness."[2] The human consciousness, serving as a metonymy for the unchanging subject of history, "acquires, progresses, and remembers" nothing less than the homogenized and synchronized temporality of the "convergence and culmination" of history in the "teleology of reason" (8). Therefore, if he is to uphold this metanarrative of progress, the traditional historian will have to construct a circular chain of signifiers (consciousness-memory-continuity-reason-subject) that transcribe historical development into the epic of a "conscious subject." Although the human subject and consciousness are the cornerstones of continuity within the chain of signification and within history itself, in principle, Foucault could contest any of the other links to achieve the same effect of the collapse of continuity. For instance, Foucault's precursor, Friedrich Nietzsche, has first taught us that both madness and "active forgetting" harbor the potential to disrupt the totalizing operations of reason and memory, transforming continuous history into a mound of fragments and ruins.

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2. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 12. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

The second manifestation of the totality in traditional historiography is the assemblage of facts and events in fixed series: "history proper was concerned to define relations . . . between facts and dated events: the series being known, it was simply a question of defining the position of each element in relation to the other elements in the series" (7). The goal of such historical methodology is to synchronize the causal links and determinations, as well as the very "dispersion" of time, in a pregiven unity of the narrative that will make sense, the epic that will coherently recount the development, adventures, challenges, and victories of its chief character, the conscious subject. Maintaining the coherence of the series, the traditional historian ignores, excludes, or renders invisible the competing and contradictory perspectives and elements that may interfere with the "teleology of reason." Consequently, the events—insofar as they emerge from the silence of the past—are not allowed to stand on their own, as monuments outside the totality, but are transformed into the documents, or signs in the chains of signification (138) that render their singularity subordinate to the series they constitute.

Further, history becomes total when its segments, periods, and various series undergo a process of homogenization, whereby each period is assigned "what is called metaphorically [its] 'face'" (9). What the "face" of the period confirms is that—in addition to governing history as a whole and the events assembled in this history—the totality determines the uniform rhythms, cycles, and periodizations of the "great" historical units apart from the political, social, mental, or other structures in question (10). This is, without a doubt, one of the most Althusserian elements in Foucault's description of traditional history, echoing the notion of the "essential section" that establishes the "contemporaneity" of the structure and transfers the logic of the whole into the specific period.[3]

For his part, Lévinas also acknowledges the significance of memory, consciousness, reason, and the subject for the emergence of the totality. Describing "the subject at the service of the system" in *Otherwise than Being*, he writes: "At the service of being, it [the subject] unites the temporal

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3. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: The Gresham P, 1977), 104.

phases into a present by retention and protention. It thus acts in the midst of the time that disperses; it acts like a subject endowed with memory . . . ."[4] Like Foucault, Lévinas conceives time before representation on the model of an "anarchic" dispersion, and memory—as a way to gather this dispersion "by retention and protention" into a coherent system of "temporal phases." The privileged time of the totality is the present, precisely, due to its dependence on the re-presentation of events in the consciousness of the subject (5). The history is always *now*, in the present that never ends and never ceases to represent events to itself. At the apex of this representation, reason guides the teleology of totalization that marks "the history of humanity *qua* realization of rational universality in mores and institutions . . . in which nothing remains other for reason."[5]

It appears, then, that the Lévinasian conception of totalizing history constituted by the chain of "self-referential signifiers" is similar to that of Foucault. Memory retains the past and projects it into the future; consciousness represents it as another more or less distant present; the progress of reason materializes in the historical development of rational mores and institutions; and the subject unites all of these ingredients within the overarching continuity of self-presence. But in another respect Lévinas drastically diverges from the Foucaultian conception, when he evacuates a certain notion of the subject from this chain and reconceptualizes subjectivity beyond the confines of both humanism and the anthropological model. For Lévinas, the subject is never fully incorporated into the totality (or reified, to use Lukácsian terminology) and, therefore, is not unproblematically equivalent to the systemic effects of either consciousness, or memory, or reason, or self-presence. On the positive side, we must not fail to notice that such a subject is ethical insofar as she embodies uniqueness outside

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4. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998), 133. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

5. Emmanuel Lévinas, "Totality and Totalization," in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael Smith (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 48. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

of any genus[6] and is situated in the "null-site" of the proximity to the other beyond any system (Lévinas, *Otherwise*, 139). It is the subject before and beyond memory and consciousness, one whose relationship to the other is prior to the birth of the question and is, therefore, not mediated by the syntheses of recollection and thought.

Nonetheless, as we have seen, in Foucault's texts the totalization of history operates on two other levels in addition to the subject-centered continuity. At the second level of the totality's constitution facts and events are assembled in the series that synchronize the dispersion of time. According to Lévinas, the construction of the totality depends on the kind of "thematization" that echoes Foucault's notion of "serialization." To thematize the other is to insert him into a conceptual network of knowledge,[7] in which each element is linked, by means of the intrinsically rational connections, to other elements on the plane of the same system. When the time of the other undergoes the process of totalization, the diachrony, or the "dephasing of the instant" is absorbed within "the recuperation of the divergency by retention [and] shows itself as a continuous and indefinite time in memory and in history" (Lévinas, *Otherwise*, 162). The loss of the diachronous "dephasing of the instant" in the continuous historical time is analogous to the Foucaultian critique of the traditional historical methodology that eliminates the dispersion of time in the synchronization of causal links between the events. While Foucault concludes that the serialization of events undermines their independence as monuments, for Lévinas, the incorporation of the time of the other in a theme amounts to a violent attempt to produce "ontological" otherness and a face fixed in a plastic, identifiable image (*Totality*, 297).

The analogy between serialization and totalization would have been complete, had Foucault not gone further with the idea of "general history." More specifically, despite rejecting serial synchronization, he advocates a search for the "series of series" in order to "determine what form of relation

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6. Emmanuel Lévinas, "Uniqueness", in *Entre Nous*, trans. Michael Smith (New York: Columbia UP, 1998), 194.

7. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1969), 88. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

may be legitimately described between these different series" (*Archaeology*, 10). From the Lévinasian point of view, what takes shape in the series of series is a higher-level totalization that utilizes lower-level totalities as elements to be brought together. But the ingenuity of Foucault's gesture is in achieving the opposite effect, namely, in exposing the discontinuity and dispersion *between* the various series, whose coherence is limited to the elements *within* them. For example, the project of a history of sexuality interrogates the conjunctions and disjunctions between the biological, medicinal, psychopathological, and other series that "called for a marked chronological displacement" of the development of sexuality.[8] The uniqueness of sexuality as an experience and a "monument," sculpted in this particular history, is heavily indebted to the chronological displacement that paradoxically disperses time at the moment of an ostensibly greater totalization (in the series of series). In the spirit of Lévinas, one may argue that this illustrates the only practice of the ethical assembly of the totality, such that what is assembled is continually disrupted, leaving the totality in a state of permanent incompletion.

At the third level of the historical totality, the disarticulation of the "series of series" occludes any unified face of the period, as well as the subdivision of time into the "great units" of history. Although Lévinas pays little or no attention to this level, he would certainly welcome the desequencing of sequences as part of the process, in which "[h]istory is worked over by the ruptures of history, in which a judgment is born" (*Totality*, 52). Applied to the Foucaultian effort, the "judgment" refers to the critical operations of general history performed on total history and the subtle incongruences the latter wishes to ignore. For the ambivalent Lévinasian—Derrida—this judgment is the prerogative of the ghost, who tangles Ariadne's thread of history in the Shakespearean anachrony (rather than diachrony): "The time is out of joint."[9] The spectral force of the living-dead (present-absent)

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8. Michel Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, 1:205, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New P, 1997), 1:205. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

9. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 18.

produces "chronological displacement" insofar as it moves within and across different periods and imports foreign, forgotten, and repressed elements into them, confusing the spectators and the survivors (read, historians).

The chronological dispersion in the reconstitution of "the series of series" and in the "ruptures of history" reveals the limits of the totalizing process. Within the framework of Foucault's investigations, these limits arise with, what he calls, "positive discontinuity": the differences, thresholds, and transformations of history unrelated to the "synthetic activity of the subject" (*Archaeology*, 14). Although Lévinas also detects the outermost edge of the totality in a phenomenon that "interrupts the continuity of historical time" (*Totality*, 58), the locus of discontinuity is diametrically opposed to the one identified by Foucault. For the former theorist, the interiority of the subject retains a dimension of irreducible secrecy that conceals the inner life of the subject from the gaze of the external spectator: "In the time of the historiographer interiority is the non-being in which everything is possible . . . —the 'everything is possible' of madness" (55). This "madness" is a dimension absolutely foreign to the historian, who is interested only in facts and "works"—the objective and objectified (hence, already dead) elements of being. But even though this dimension of existence might be impenetrable for the historian, both the possibilities it harbors and the effects it generates are undeniable. As such, it will never be inscribed in a historiography; no matter how open to discontinuity the historiography is, interiority will always present itself as an undecipherable *chiffre*.

Foucault's response to this "reversal" of discontinuity will be found in the exemplary technique of the self that derives from the Christian notion of the confession. Confession, broadly understood, involves a verbalization of one's thoughts, "but also the smallest movements of consciousness" and intentions before the authority figure (Foucault, *Ethics*, 248). The aim of the confession is, precisely, to breach the fortress of interiority (already constituted as breached by the other) and, consequently, to gain access to the potentiality of certain actions, offenses, and transgressions before they have been acted upon. The priests, including the new high priests of the contemporary western culture, such as psychologists and other "human scientists,"

accomplish the task in which the historiographers failed,
namely, the inscription of what has not yet materialized in
"works."

In his turn, Lévinas would argue that "secrecy" is incom-
mensurate with the thoughts that are hoarded intrasub-
jectively and later verbalized at some point in time, or
withheld as private information. Rather, it is modeled on
the death agony "in the ambiguity of a time that has run out
and of a mysterious time that yet remains" (*Totality*, 56). In
both cases secrecy refers to the untraversable intervals of
separation (discretion) between the existent and the
temporalities of his life and death.

The tension between the Foucaultian and the Lévinasian
renditions of the limits of totalization is symptomatic of the
nuances and subtleties inherent in the difference between
the attempts to internally transform and to transcend
history. Whereas Foucault fails to account for the possibility
of a subject outside of the continuum, indeed the simul-
taneity, of the individualizing and the totalizing processes
that form the "modern power structures,"[10] Lévinas falls
short of considering the possibility of a non-totalizing
history: "history being not just any element to totalize, but
totalization itself" (*Alterity*, 47). Nonetheless, a more sus-
tained and thorough dialogue is required, if we are to con-
struct a combined Lévinasian-Foucaultian approach to what
I call the "trans-transformation of history," exceeding any
reformulations of the old discipline from within. But in
order to move in this direction, we must recognize that what
is lacking in each theory is precisely the innovation that the
other has to offer. On one hand, without the Lévinasian
contribution, Foucault will continue to move within the
"immanence" of history, or between different levels of the
philosophy of history. And on the other, if it remains
uninformed by the Foucaultian approach, Lévinas's theory
of subjectivity will be caught within the region of pure
"transcendence" beyond history. Such a disparity requires
the kind of fine-tuning that will combine the immanence of
history with the transcendence of the subject in, what I am

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10. Michel Foucault, *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed.
Paul Rabinow (New York: The New P, 2000), 3:336. All further references to this
text will be cited parenthetically.

tempted to call, the "trans-transformative" register beyond history in history.

The destabilization of the totality that has reached the limits of totalization is a necessary, but insufficient pre-condition for transcendence and for the possibility of a new historiography. In addition to exposing these limits, Lévinas and Foucault resort to the deliberate strategies of opposition to the totality of history. While the latter theorist makes use of the "genealogical" approach influenced principally by Nietzsche, the former resorts to the "eschatology" informed by the Jewish religious tradition. Yet, both terms, at least in their etymological origin, are deceptive: genealogy does not propose to study the *genus* of classified events, and eschatology distances itself from the notion of *eschaton*—the end, or completion, of time. It is as if both terms rebel against the (Greek) language that names them; while the former aspires to study events in their singularity, instead of generality, the latter "culminates" in the infinity of time, instead of its completion.

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Foucault describes the genealogical approach as a search for "the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly . . . form a network that is difficult to unravel."[11] Methodologically this requires paying careful attention to the "details and acci-dents" of events maintained "in their proper dispersion" (374). Therefore, recalling the earlier critique of the seriali-zation of events, the genealogical approach offers an alter-native way of writing history without the subordination of singularities to the logic of the wholes, such as historical segments and periods. In other words, it instantiates a monumental—rather than documental—historiography.

Lévinas's fairly brisk and concise engagements with eschatology demonstrate a similar concern with singularity. Because "justice would not be possible without the sin-gularity, the unicity of subjectivity" (*Totality*, 246), the only judgment capable of delivering justice would be the eschatological "judgment of God" "pronounced upon me in the measure that it summons me to respond" (244). Fur-thermore, the judgment of God is contrasted with another

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11. Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New P, 1998), 2:373. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

judgment—that of history—"pronounced in absentia" (242) after my death in the literal or figural sense of the deceased existent or the will objectified in "works." In either case, eschatology connotes a relation or judgment outside of the historical totality in the ethical null-site of proximity to the other.

The effort to salvage singularity is common to the Lévinasian eschatology and the Foucaultian genealogy. But there are also important divergences between the two: first, the meaning of singularity and, second, the site of its inscription. Lévinas conceives singularity as the "unicity" and uniqueness of the ethical subject who responds and is, therefore, responsible to the other. There is nothing accidental about the singularity of the subject, whose very incarnation apodictically "elects" her to serve the Good: "To be in oneself is to express oneself, that is, already to serve the Other" (183). Likewise, the dispersion of time in the singular transhistorical event *par excellence* (the event of facing the other) is not contingent, for the time of the other is already different from the (deferred) time of the self. For Foucault, on the other hand, the event is said to be singular on account of its "randomness" (*Aesthetics*, 381), that is to say, the chance inclusion and exclusion of the intersecting discursive formations, systems of enunciation, and group-ings of statements. Historical necessity is unequivocally relegated to the teleological conception of history that under-lines the inevitability of what was meant to happen.

Moreover, in the Foucaultian paradigm, the site of the inscription of singularity is the new type of historiography committed to the immersion into the most minute and seemingly insignificant details of the event. Such a fidelity to description is reminiscent of Edmund Husserl's pheno-menological method (albeit, without the subject) that hinges upon the "pure descriptions" and "detailed investigations" of phenomena.[12] Despite the Husserlian influences on the Lévinasian philosophy, the "pure description" of the other is what Lévinas rejects most vehemently. The eschatological judgment of God, involving the subject's proximity to the other, does not inscribe singularity in history, rather, "eschatology instantiates a relation with being *beyond the*

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12. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Russian trans. Sam Frank (Moscow: Harvest, 2000), 252.

totality or beyond history" (Lévinas, *Totality,* 22). Thus, following the lines of demarcation between the transcendence and immanence of history, there is little overlap between the sites of singularity in Foucault's and Lévinas's theories. Whereas in the former it occupies the space of the new historical methodology, in the latter singularity exceeds both the ontology of history and the descriptive approach.

The combined promise of eschatology and genealogy is perhaps not (only) in the emphasis they place on singularity, but (also) in the original rethinking of the origin and the end, the beginning and the finality, of time and history. In the genealogical analysis the origin, or genesis as a fixed point in time, vanishes, giving way to the chaotic disparity and dissension of events (Foucault, *Aesthetics*, 372). The outcomes of the dissipation of the origin include more than a mere obliqueness and insufficiency of the historical knowledge; they also, and necessarily, politicize historical dynamics. What the historical beginning conceived as a disparity and a dissension signifies is the struggle among multiple forces for the right to claim the origin as their own. In other words, it refers to the situation of law-making, or originary, violence disguised behind the "mythical forms of law."[13] It follows that the illusion of the "lofty origins" and the ensuing narrative of the Fall (Foucault, *Aesthetics*, 372) are but the end results of the process that deliberately erases the memory of the struggle. It also follows that to place "present needs at the origin" (376) is to perpetuate Benjaminian "law-preserving violence," such that the fictitious origin is continuously readjusted to and exploited by the current authorities.

Like Foucault, who dispels the myth of a unitary origin, Lévinas theorizes the preoriginary moments incompatible with memory and the consciousness. Two such moments are the interrelated notions of the trace and creation *ex nihilo*. First, although the trace designates the absolute and irreversible past, it is not without a bearing on the "beyond" of the future to come: "A trace qua trace does not simply lead toward the past, but is the very *passing* toward a past more remote than any past and any future which still are set in my time—the past of the other, in which eternity takes

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13. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 300.

form, and absolute past which unites all times."[14] In the
eschatology of the trace, the anteriority and the posteriority
of the historical totality merge in "the absolute past which
unites all times," except—one might add—the forever pre-
sent tense of consciousness and representation. The trace is
more ancient than any origin and more future than the
future precisely because it precedes any recallable historical
event and surpasses any anticipation or projection. Instead
of dissipating the origin in the dissension of events, Lévinas
humbles everything that asserts its originary nature. The
historical beginning is always already second(ary), for it is
merely a usurpation of the non-place of the trace.

    Second, creation *ex nihilo* resonates with Foucault's con-
ceptualization of the beginning as a genealogical multi-
plicity. For Lévinas, "the idea of creation *ex nihilo* expresses
a multiplicity not united in a totality." Breaking with the
system, it "posits a being outside of every system, that is,
there where its freedom is possible" (*Totality*, 104). Here
Lévinas and Foucault are united against the foundations of
the Hegelian dialectic, in which the origin is both preserved
and surpassed in the course of *Aufhebung*, or sublation. If
the present needs are not traceable to the origin in one form
or another, and if creation *ex nihilo* does not utilize the same
essence from which various existents are derived, then the
dialectical logic, in which "Spirit is *essentially* the result of
its own activity,"[15] is no longer sustainable. Another blow is
dealt to this logic when both genealogy and eschatology
entertain the thought of a multiplicity that is inconceivable
in terms of the differentiation and internal complexity
within a totality. Harkening back to the privileging of
singularity *in* a nontotalizable multiplicity, this blow is
intensified by the randomness of the genealogical event and
the absolute separation of the "created" existents. Whereas
the randomness, chance, and accidental nature of the event
rule out any necessary inner laws of the historical move-
ment, the absolute separation of the existents who, to use
Alphonso   Lingis's   expression,   "have   nothing   in

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14. Emmanuel Lévinas, "The Trace of the Other", in *Deconstruction in Context:
Literature and Philosophy*, ed. M. C. Taylor (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P,
1986), 358.

15. G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. R. S. Hartman (Upper Saddle
River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997), 94 (emphasis added).

common"—not even their essence—disrupts the "meta-physical monism" and "unity of all beings" presupposed by the dialectic.[16]

In addition to the rethinking of the beginnings, genealogy and eschatology rearticulate the notion of the end. Accord-ing to Foucault, genealogy "must record the singularity of the events outside of any monotonous finality" (*Aesthetics*, 369). The multiplicity of the beginnings is, therefore, trans-ferred onto the diversity of the "ends" beyond the "mono-tonous finality." Analogously, eschatology requires trans-cendence in the relation with infinity that "overflows the thought that thinks it" (Lévinas, *Totality*, 25). To reiterate, Lévinasian eschatology is divorced from its etymological sense and the association with the end, as it opens up the dimensions of infinite time and the infinity of the other. Thus, in relation to the apocalyptic "end of history," eschatology and genealogy may be understood as two critical responses to the teleological historical metanarratives.

Yet, at the same time that eschatology is dissociated from *eschaton*, it triumphs "in the *time without me*, beyond the horizon of my time, in an eschatology without a hope for oneself, or in a liberation, from my time."[17] In *Totality and Infinity* this eschatological liberation is achieved through the relations of fecundity and paternity, and in *Otherwise than Being*, it is accomplished via substitution of "the I" for the other. Regardless of the "method" of liberation, the goal is to imagine the transcendence of "the I" (of my time) that will not slip into the impersonal Neuter (the universal Time) and the anonymous atemporal rustling of the *il y a* (or, the "there is"). In other words, Lévinas's concern here is not to transcend the uniqueness of the ethical existent that, de facto, impels this transcendence.

Approaching this issue from the standpoint of genealogy, Foucault, on the other hand, implies that the problem of "my time" is fictitious: "Where the soul pretends unification or the Me fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning—numberless beginnings . . . " (*Aesthetics*, 374). Any personal time is nothing other than

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16. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 7.

17. Emmanuel Lévinas, "Meaning and Sense," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998), 92.

the time of a *persona dramatis*, a mask adapted for an
instant in the carnival of history. Such a mask is neither as
permanent, nor as binding as the inescapable incarnation of
"the I" in "my time." Consequently, for Foucault, the "libera-
tion from my time" represents but a small fragment in a
larger project of divestment from all "mine-ness" (especially
from "my" fabricated identity), and death connotes the dan-
gerous possibility of wearing the last mask.

So far the movement "beyond history in history" has been
described through the categories of eschatology and genea-
logy: the thrust "beyond history" under the auspices of the
former and the reworking of history "in history" under the
banner of the latter. It is through the infusion of eschato-
logy into genealogy that the two movements are combined,
such that the nonhistorical encounter with the other both
takes place in and overflows a particular historical event.
What is still lacking in this preliminary "schema" is the
mechanism, as it were, of the conjunction of transcendence
and immanence, or the way of articulating eschatology with
genealogy. To access this mechanism, another detour will
be required—the detour through the Foucaultian "archive"
and the Lévinasian "saying without the said," as the
premises and foundations of the movement "beyond history
in history."

By the archive Foucault means neither a collection of
historical documents, nor even a set of traces left by the past
events. Rather, the archive connotes a "complex volume" of
the "system of statements," in which "the law of what can be
said" is established (*Archaeology*, 128-29). Furthermore, the
statements should not be conflated with the "propositions"
materialized in sentences or groups of signs (95). The
statements and the archive are anterior to the propositions,
insofar as the former serve as a potentiality and a breeding
ground of the latter. As Gilles Deleuze put it in an influen-
tial book on Foucault, "the statements become readable or
sayable only in relation to the conditions which make them
so and which constitute their inscription on an 'enunciative
base.'"[18] But, when it is inscribed on the "enunciative base,"
the statement already crosses the threshold of its difference

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18. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota
P, 1988), 54.

from the proposition. Thus, the statement is archaeologically excavated and forms a monument.

If Foucault's theory regards the archival statement as a condition of possibility of the historical proposition, Lévinas considers the saying to be the anarchic, preoriginal opening of the said: "Saying saying saying itself" is "not the communication of a said, but saying holding open its openness . . . [and] delivering itself without saying anything said" (*Otherwise*, 143). At the risk of oversimplification, one may observe that saying is the very moment when "the I" addresses the other, or offers my speech to her; it is the instant of turning toward and facing the other before any words are uttered. In this respect, the saying is the motivating potentiality behind the said (because I face the other, I speak to him about X, and not vice versa), which is at the same time "betrayed" in the said (158). The reason for this "betrayal" is the thematization or congealment of the saying in the said (46) and in everything that accompanies the said: the rules of linguistic and grammatical construction, the historical context, and, in general, the "inscription on an 'enunciative base.'" Therefore, in contradistinction to the Foucaultian archive, the saying is not "the *law* of what can be said," but a prejuridical (anarchic) basis of all law without any formalization and before all inscriptions.

In the essay entitled "On the Ways of Writing History," Foucault aligns the archive with archaeology understood as "the analysis of discourse in its *archival* form" (*Aesthetics*, 290). This definition is in agreement with the one offered in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, where Foucault writes that the goal of the archaeological approach is to formulate "a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence," describing "discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive" (131). Such a preoccupation with the fidelity to "the level of existence" may be confused with a quasi-religious commitment to the historical truth, to "telling it as it happened." Nonetheless, it is evident that archaeology eschews, or at the very least attempts to avoid, any *post festum* speculations, interpretations, and hermeneutical machinations performed with the historical documents, precisely, owing to the "new archivist's"—one of the designations bestowed upon Foucault by Deleuze—emphasis on something that approximates the Lévinasian "betrayal" of the saying in the said. The height of the

betrayal, for Foucault, would be a hermeneutical decipher-
ment of the document that reveals a hidden reason for the
occurrence of the event it relays, or worse yet, the
"serialization" of the event in the historical totality. Hence,
the connection of the archive with "the historical *a priori*"
(127) of the monument, as opposed to the historical *a
posteriori* of the document.

   The central archaeological concern with "the level of
existence" has led to a number of criticisms, some of which
are worth recounting here. First, in *History and Criticism*
Dominick LaCapra repudiates the archive's "indiscriminate
mystique." He writes: "The archive as a fetish is a literal
substitute for the "reality" of the past which is "always
already" lost for the historian. When it [the archive] is
fetishized . . . it is a stand-in for the past that brings the
mystified experience of the thing itself—an experience that
is always open to question when one deals with writing or
other inscriptions."[19] The source of the confusion repre-
sented as a full-fledged "mystification" and "fetishization"
lies in the tremendous difficulty, if not the impossibility, of
describing, identifying, or even saying, "the law of what can
be said," "that which, outside ourselves, delimits us"
(Foucault, *Archaeology*, 130). At the exact instant when the
archivist attempts to formulate a statement, the statement
eludes him and reverts into a proposition. Along the same
lines, Lévinas may be criticized for the pretension to express
the saying, saying itself "otherwise than being" in the very
language of the said and of being. The gravity of these
allegations stems from the perception that not only have
both theorists overstepped the bounds of their authority, but
that, in so doing, they have also undermined the foundations
of the philosophical authority as such. To return to the
excerpt from LaCapra's book, the mystique of the archive
becomes "indiscriminate," when a rather nostalgic archaeo-
logist acts and thinks *as if* he were there in the "reality of
the past," which is but the illusionary facade of the ubiquit-
ous archive. In other words, relying on the invisible and
inaudible archive and saying, Lévinas and Foucault com-
mitted an even greater betrayal—the replacement of
"reality" with "mystique"—than the one they had tried to

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19. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 344.

repudiate: the one that oscillated between more or less correct versions of reality.

The second, though not unrelated, critique of archaeology emanates from Jacques Derrida, who explicates the "archaeology of silence" in the history of madness. At the heart of the critique is a characteristically Derridian *aporia* of "the archaeology which simultaneously claims to say madness itself and renounce this claim. The expression 'to say madness itself' is self-contradictory."[20] This expression is contradictory because saying madness-silence "itself," one already breaks the silence and rationalizes madness. (One may recall that Lévinas also alludes to a certain silence of the saying "delivering itself without saying anything said.") Perhaps unexpectedly, with this logical impossibility, Derrida's critique provides the key for its own and LaCapra's misinterpretation of Foucault and, by implication, of Lévinas. Neither the archive, nor the saying without the said refers to the mere absence of discourse; rather, they both stand for the silence prior to the utterance, which becomes audible thanks to and within this silence. Similarly, the distinction between what constitutes "reality" different from "mystique" can be drawn *only after a myriad of possibilities have been included in and excluded from what can and what cannot be said*, and following "the I's" turn to the other in order to say what can be said. Thus, LaCapra and Derrida overlook the radical self-critique that operates at the level "before" the said, and misread the archive as the abandonment of the critical attitude in general.

The threshold between the statement and the proposition, as well as the structure of the saying in the said, enable transcendence in immanence and the movement beyond history in history. The saying without the said delivered in the proximity of the one to the other is "a disturbance of the rememberable time" and "the untamable diachrony of non-historical, non-said time, which cannot be synchronized . . ." (Lévinas, *Otherwise*, 89). In its turn, history arises from and is constantly disturbed by this disturbance, as it undertakes to synchronize the diachrony of the saying and the said and, necessarily, fails in this endeavor. As a historiographer, I

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20. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978), 43.

may identify the segment of a population labeled as "the twentieth-century Canadian single mother," or "the seventeenth-century illiterate Indian peasant"; I may apply these general characteristics to describe the typical and atypical members of these populations, but the imposed identity will not encompass the alterity and the singular time of the other. And although the obverse of this incompatibility is rarely valorized in Lévinasian philosophy, as the one in the proximity of the other, "the I" cannot ignore the historical constraints and possibilities in which this encounter takes place. As Enrique Dussel would say, the "peripheral" other in late capitalism[21] is not the same other that exists in early capitalism, and so forth.

In one of the eloquent interviews devoted to *The Order of Things*, Foucault addresses a comparable dilemma in the terms of archaeological approach. Observing that the human sciences are often "caught . . . in a double obligation" to the hermeneutical exegesis on one hand, and systemic, structural formalization on the other, he concludes: "What I undertook was precisely the archaeological research of what has made this ambiguity possible" (*Aesthetics*, 263). What "made this ambiguity possible" is not the interiority— be it of the system, or of the hermeneutical circle to be interpreted—but the exteriority that animates these interiorities in the first place. That is to say: archaeology is "the intrinsic description of the monument" (Foucault, *Archaeology*, 7) in a very strange sense of "intrinsic-ness": although it emphasizes the history of the said "at the level of its existence," it also weighs this level against the exteriority of statements, of what could and could not be said, and of the "enunciative bases" that imperfectly transfigure the statements into propositions. All of these elements can be situated on the margins and in the lacunae between history and the "beyond" of history, between what happened and what did not happen (or perhaps happened and was immediately forgotten), and between those victorious and those vanquished in the "dissension of events."

While Lévinas intends to show that the true exteriority unfolds through the a-historical proximity to the other in the

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21. Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricouer, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. E. Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1996), 5.

saying without the said, Foucault's archive reveals the exteriority in the very depths of history, in and among the different archaeological levels and layers. Yet, both the archive and the saying achieve the same results by demonstrating that the consciousness and memory of the subject are of the secondary nature (insofar as they are the derivatives of the unsayable statements in the first case, and of proximity to the other in the second). Furthermore, the archive and the saying dethrone the repetition of the present in history and deflate re-presentation in general. In fact, it is difficult to grasp what an archive actually *is* because the archive *is not* something represented but the "law of what can be said," thought, and represented. It is potentially even more difficult to represent the saying without the said offered to the other in proximity, which is "indescribable in the literal sense of the term, unconvertible into a history, irreducible to the simultaneousness of writing . . ." (Lévinas, *Otherwise*, 166).

Despite these undeniable difficulties, the Foucaultian-Lévinasian challenge to historiography and the history of ideas alike is a radical self-critique, the critique pushed to the limit of the "critical attitude," whose familiar first gesture is to draw a firm line between "reality" and "mystique." "For," as Theodor Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*, "the value of a thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar."[22] The uniqueness of the archive and of the saying is commensurate with the greatest distance "from the continuity of the familiar" in the philosophy of history and, at the same time, the greatest proximity to the standpoint of the living existents buried under the "propositions" and "the said" of this philosophy.

This critique of historiography, however, is not univocal. A curious shift in Lévinas's relation to history may be detected in the transition from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*. In the earlier work, Lévinas unequivocally states that history represents "cruelty and injustice," since "as a relationship between men [it] ignores a position of the I before the other in which the other remains transcendent with respect to me" (52). The violence of history is reflected in an attempt to locate the (already dead) existents on the

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22. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York and London: Verso, 1978), 80.

homogenous plane of the "spatial" chronological temporality through which the totality is constructed. Yet in *Otherwise than Being* history is assigned a more positive, though ambivalent, role alongside justice. It is argued that "there must be justice among incomparable ones. There must then be a comparison between incomparables and a synopsis, togetherness and contemporaneousness; there must be thematization, thought, history and inscription" (16).

While the reasons behind this shift are complex, it is possible to conjecture that in his later works Lévinas is more influenced by the philosophy of Derrida, and vice versa. Perhaps his theory of justice has become more Derridian (and hence moved to the side of ontology), or perhaps the shift is a result of the "pragmatic" refinement of "ethics as first philosophy" in lieu of the entry of the "third" who demands justice and disturbs the ethical idyll. In any case, there is no longer a flat rejection of the necessity of justice and history thanks to the inevitability of the "comparison between incomparables."

What does this shift have to do with the Foucaultian rethinking of history along the double axes of archaeology and genealogy? On one hand, for the early Lévinas the difference between the Foucaultian and the traditional historiographies would not signify a major breakthrough, since both are examples of historical investigations that ossify and ontologize human relations. On the other hand, in the later philosophy of Lévinas, more attention is devoted to the gradations of justice, the more or less just, as well as the impossibility of the full or complete justice that would accurately perform the "comparison of incomparables." This, then, sets the stage for the question of the (ethical) ends of the movement "beyond history in history," as well as for the criteria, according to which one historiography is more or less just than the other. For instance, against the background of the "total history" that emanates from the traditional historiography, Foucault's "general history" is more just and less violent, for it attempts to reconcile the demands of singularity, discontinuity, and difference with the writing of history.

But, in spite of the strategies of "the least violence" utilized by Foucault, the remnants of injustice persist in his theory of history. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault reproaches traditional history for the fear "to conceive of the

Other in the time of our own thought" (12). Such a reproach will give rise to a number of questions and criticisms posed by the philosophy of Lévinas that rejects the prospect of simultaneously conceiving "of the *Other*" and preserving the alterity of the other in this conception. From the Lévinasian vantage point, to insert the other in "the time of our own thought" is to inflict one of the greatest injustices onto the other, speaking *of* her in the "accusative form" (*Otherwise*, 106), instead of addressing her in the "vocative." Thus, the impossibility of speaking *to* the other in the discourse of historiography marks the limits of this discourse's usefulness, regardless of the more just forms it may take.

Foucault's response to this criticism elucidates the nature of "the time of our thought" that Lévinas largely takes for granted. Conceiving the other in the "time of our own thought," Foucault dispenses to the other the realm that is properly her own, namely, the realm of difference. The archival analysis "establishes that we are difference, that our own reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the difference of masks" (*Archaeology*, 131). Therefore, Foucault would claim that he locates the other in the non-space of difference ("our own reason is the difference of discourses") without subjecting the alterity of the other to the homogenization in the same. This theoretical gesture will compensate for the impossibility of invoking the other in the discourse of historiography, because all of our discourses are nothing but a constant polyvocal exchange and a perpetual negotiation and renegotiation of our relation with the other.

At the same time, Foucault would consider Lévinas to be representative of a somewhat modified "historico-transcendental thematic" (*Aesthetics*, 332), which substitutes the return of the immemorial preorigin for the vision of "the end of history" as the recovery of the forgotten origin. This vestige of the nineteenth-century problematic is attributable to Lévinas's insistence upon the irreducibility of the subject and interiority. In addition, with respect to the "beginning of history," Lévinas undertakes to accomplish the same thing that Foucault wishes to avoid at all cost—to "recapture that illusive nucleus in which the author and the *oeuvre* exchange identities" (Foucault, *Archaeology*, 139). In the Lévinasian terminology this transition is the beginning of history, the first injustice of the will that is separated from

itself in the "works" (*Totality*, 39), and the inscription of
speech in writing. The crux of the Foucaultian criticism of
the "beginning" and the "end" of history lies in the fact that
transcendence and totalization are theorized solely in
relation to the interiority of the subject, or as various ways
of the subject's relation with exteriority. The outcome of
such privileging of interiority is that it serves as the
absolute (and absolutely uncontested) reference point for the
judgment pronounced on the (in)justice of the various
processes within and beyond history.

If Lévinas were to reply to these comments, he would
remind Foucault that his conception of the subject is
opposed to the one that equates subjectivity with the abode
of continuous history. The Lévinasian subject is neither
transcendental, nor totalizing, in the sense of the transcen-
dence of singularity in the Kantian or Hegelian philosophy.
Instead, the subject is that which stands outside of any
system, including the totality of history. Moreover, among
the other shifts discernable between *Totality and Infinity*
and *Otherwise than Being* is a partial abandonment of the
notions such as the "dwelling" and "interiority." In the
latter work, the subject beyond the system is the one in the
service of the other, "a *sub-jectum* . . . under the weight of
the universe, responsible for everything" (116). The recon-
ceptualization of the subject as the one in the service of the
other, or "the-one-for-the-other" of signification, removes her
from the narrow confines of interiority and repositions her
in the null-sites of "the excluded middle" (80) that is neither
within nor without.

The role of the historian is also a point of contention for
Lévinas and Foucault. Along the Nietzschean line of
thought, Foucault suggests an alternative to the self-efface-
ment of the historian in the suprahistorical perspective from
which he gazes upon history (*Aesthetics*, 383). For the
genealogist it is not enough to simply gaze upon history: the
historian's gaze is always perspectival, always steeped in
the "historian's history," always an effect of the disparate
discourses intermeshing with one another. Therefore, one
must gaze at the gazer (and this could include self-examina-
tion) with the glance that "separates and disperses" to the
point of "decomposing itself" (379). In contrast to traditional
historiography, neither the genealogist, nor the archivist
remains as faceless as the historian "who mimics death in

order to enter the kingdom of the dead" (384). Instead, they account for their laughter, detestation, and lamentation, justifying the historical knowledges they produce.

Yet, Lévinasian philosophy will contend that providing a justification is still far from rendering justice. If the historian is to remain a historian, he will be a survivor, entering the kingdom of the dead and appropriating the works of the dead who are unable to respond. The genealogist can preserve her face; she can speak from her unique perspective; she can laugh, lament, and detest. Inevitably, however, the genealogist will face only the facelessness of the dead; that is, she will find herself speaking, lamenting, and laughing in the infamous "silence of the cemeteries." There is a fundamental injustice in the historian's appropriation of the right to speak, when the other is reduced to the absolute silence of death. For, no matter how painstakingly the uniqueness of the other is reconstructed in archaeology or genealogy, the alterity of the other is lost in the historian's "monologue" (Lévinas, *Totality*, 72). Whereas Foucault is content with the "historian's history" of *the witness (histor) who witnesses himself witnessing the "other,"* Lévinas's notion of justice requires the transhistorical face-to-face relation of the witness who witnesses himself *witnessed by the other.*

In one of the lectures on "Truth and Juridical Forms," delivered in 1973, Foucault describes a knowledge-producing mechanism that operates according to the "rule of the halves," whereby "the discovery of truth proceeds . . . by the fitting together and interlocking of halves" (*Power*, 19). The "rule of the halves" is what underwrites the kind of comparisons delineated above, spanning transcendence and immanence, eschatology and genealogy, the saying and the archive, the proper names "Lévinas" and "Foucault." These halves require a patient and laborious assemblage, if one is to solve the new "riddle of the Sphinx": What is the movement beyond history in history? There are several leads and hints so far: the singular "null-sites" (the event and the other), overflowing the historical narratives in which they are featured; the internal limits of totalization found in the spaces of rupture and dispersion; the unsayable possibilities of the said, arising from the archive and the saying; and the strategies of the least violence, transforming history, the incarnation of violence par excellence, into something else

altogether. And when the riddle is finally solved, when the last halves are eventually assembled, the tyrant will be dethroned (26) and history will surrender its autocratic power to "every new human face."[23]

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23. Emmanuel Lévinas, *The New Talmudic Readings*, trans. Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1999), 92.

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