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Beyond Ontology:  
Levinas and the Ethical Frame in Film

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From its beginning, film set forth a new scene for ethical and moral engagement. For more than a century, film's frame and image have opened fresh space for enacting ethical and moral conflicts and dilemmas. To scholars and critics such as André Bazin, it became apparent that in film matters of aesthetics influence ethical and moral questions (Bazin 2005, 39–40). As Dudley Andrew says: 'In cinema, aesthetic issues lead immediately to moral ones' (Andrew 2005, xxi).

Today, the connection between aesthetic and ethical issues in film acquires new meaning from the relationship between time and ethics as described so differently by Gilles Deleuze, Paul Ricoeur, and Emmanuel Levinas. While only Deleuze directly addresses and discusses cinema, the work of all three on the relationship of time and ethics to a variety of issues – movement, space, otherness, identity, selfhood, and narrative – also pertains to and informs the interaction between aesthetic and ethical issues in film. Indeed, Deleuze and Ricoeur contrive compelling theories, concepts, and operations concerning time, movement and narrative that facilitate film's participation in ethical discourse. From a Levinasian perspective, their work provides tools and means for relating film and Levinasian ethical language to each other. Individually and collectively, Deleuze, Ricoeur, and Levinas seek a discordant and disruptive temporal order for re-engaging ethical and moral exigencies and investing new ideas and fresh imagination in a revived ethical debate. In this debate, aesthetic issues and ethical issues in film continue the process of mutual regeneration.

### **Film, Time, and Ethics: A Theoretical Progression**

Clearly, the philosophies of Deleuze, Ricoeur, and Levinas differ dramatically in a great variety of ways. Deleuze and Levinas certainly approach ethics from radically different positions based on their contrasting philosophies. Deleuze famously eschews transcendence in favor of a theory of immanent and immediate experience, while Levinas espouses a powerful adherence to ethical transcendence in the form of absolute responsibility to the other. Somewhat in a position of mediation, Ricoeur's extraordinary body and range of work over many years affirm the importance of language, semantics, and continuous interpretation of all aspects of thought and experience. However, in spite of their differences, important elements of the work and thought of Deleuze, Ricoeur, and Levinas can be seen to join together in the cinematic frame and image.

Thus, in describing film frame and image as part of ethical discourse and debate, Deleuze, Ricoeur, and Levinas can be considered in a progression that goes from time, movement and space with Deleuze; to Ricoeur's concentration on time, narrative and the self; to the priority in Levinas of an ethics that supersedes ontology. In his cinema books, Deleuze describes a cinematic frame of internal and external action that eventually leads to a reversal of movement and time so that time comes to subordinate movement. He proposes the possibility of a radical time-image that urges a new understanding of the relationship of time to film. Ricoeur's theory of the refiguration of time through the interweaving of fiction and history in narrative applies to film. He also describes a form of temporal and narrative structure that positions the "space" or scene of appearance and "experience" in a tense relationship with the "horizon of expectations" (Ricoeur 1988, 101–104, 192, 208). This model of a framed scene of experience in taut engagement with a moving horizon of anticipated change can be applied as well to issues of temporality and movement in the cinematic frame and image. Similarly, Ricoeur's analysis of temporal aporetics and narrative and his discussion of time in the construction of identity, moral selfhood, and the self as other also relate to time and ethics in the structure and content of film.

In focusing upon the centrality of time to ethics and morals in film, the post-structuralism of Deleuze and the hermeneutics of Ricoeur prepare the stage for understanding how in Levinas time and alterity, the same and the other, the synchronic and diachronic also can be seen to articulate an ethical metaphysics in film. All three thinkers suggest an alternative temporality for film of diachronic disjuncture and disruption that opens a new dimension for ethical confrontation with the complacency of

unchallenged temporality and thought. In this light, Levinasian ethics suggests a potential for film that goes beyond the classic understanding of the ontology of the cinematic image to point to a transcendent dimension in film in the relationship to the other.

The importance of a different dimension of time for Levinas and the Cinema of Redemption, a pattern of films to be discussed in detail later, includes its suggestion of a relationship of 'holiness' that connects people to each other and infinity. For Levinas holiness involves the inseparable connection between transcendence and ethics. He says: 'There is no model of transcendence outside ethics' (Levinas 2000, 194). Transcendence occurs in a relationship that involves the time of the other, a force of difference and separation that ethically still compels belief, commitment and action. In an interview with François Poirié, Levinas says: 'Certainly there is holiness, in being occupied with someone other before being occupied with oneself, in watching over someone other, in responding to someone other before responding to oneself. The human is the possibility of holiness' (Robbins 2001, 54–55). By rethinking the relationship of time and ethics, Deleuze and Ricoeur help imagine this possibility of holiness for Levinasian ethics, including its promising application to film.

To a certain extent, some of Levinas's language indicates the potential in his thought for the connection between film and philosophy. In different places, he proffers a terminology that suggests how crucial aspects of his philosophical and ethical discourse gain structure and definition through the use of a cinematic term. He demonstrates that his phenomenological method can compare to the thought and aesthetic processes of cinematic scene and image construction. Levinas repeatedly uses 'mise-en-scène' – the theatrical term for setting of the scene that cinema has adapted for setting, lighting, costume, and acting – to explain and describe his positions. In 'Proximity of the Other,' Levinas uses *mise-en-scène* figuratively to describe 'the "*mise-en-scène*" of the infinite, an inexhaustible, concrete responsibility' (Levinas 1999, 105). In this usage, *mise-en-scène* serves as a kind of metaphor to help make the unfathomable idea of infinite responsibility to the other concrete and understandable. In 'Violence of the Face,' *mise-en-scène*, also helps Levinas explain how to think and to see philosophically and phenomenologically. Here *mise-en-scène* becomes crucial to describe 'the mental procedure' that renders 'concrete meaning' to 'datum' that has become 'but an abstraction' (Levinas 1999, 174–175). Similarly, in 'Transcendence and Intelligibility,' he says that 'to do phenomenology' that escapes 'abstraction,' it helps to do the "staging"

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or “*mise-en-scène*” that avoids such “abstractions” (Levinas 1996, 158). In *In the Time of the Nations*, Levinas uses “*mise-en-scène*” to describe ‘the reconstitution of any object or notion’ (Levinas 1994, 181, 180) Also, in an interview with Poirié, he remarks that to achieve ‘the true thinking and the thinking of the true,’ it becomes necessary to ‘move from the object to its *mise-en-scène*’ (Robbins 2001, 32).

However, in a later interview with Christoph von Wolzogen, Levinas perhaps makes his most interesting and direct statement about the linkage between phenomenology and *mise-en-scène*. Before noting that ‘consciousness is precisely this staging,’ he says, ‘phenomenology is the search for a *mise-en-scène*’ (Robbins 2001, 151). In this interview, he emphasises the importance of ‘*time*’ in making the ‘*mise-en-scène*’ in the ‘synthesis’ of Kant’s schema ‘sensible’ (Robbins 2001, 152). Just as in film, therefore, time and *mise-en-scène*, make ‘such a thing concrete’ (Robbins 2001, 152).

In these statements, Levinas’s reliance upon a basic term of film art to describe and dramatise a fundamental process of phenomenology suggests an inherent compatibility between film as thought process and philosophy. Levinas’s language suggests that thinking philosophically and phenomenologically literally compares to thinking cinematically, that seeing and understanding an object clearly involves a process that relates to the cinematic term of *mise-en-scène*. Thus, *mise-en-scène* seems to become an exchangeable term between Levinas’s phenomenology of the clarity of the mind’s consciousness of an object and the importance of the term for setting up and understanding film. This compatibility further indicates the potential for broadening ethical and moral discourse by relating it to aesthetic issues involved in film.

### **Deleuze: Liberating Time from Space**

Opposed in so many ways to Levinas’s philosophical position and to his moral and ethical demands, Deleuze’s film philosophy nevertheless contains elements that can be of great importance in applying Levinasian theory to film. Deleuze reconsiders the relationship of time and movement in film in a way that theorises freeing time from the domination of movement and space. In terms of working with film, Deleuze’s theoretical imagination opens a way of seeing film from a Levinasian perspective that proffers the importance of a discordant temporal order for new ethical discourse. Deleuze contrives a whole new vocabulary and terminology to describe the ethical and philosophical implications of the dynamic composition and perennial movement of film. In a manner that relates to the Levinasian argument for a spiritual realm, Deleuze summarises the

operation of a system of inter-connected moving parts that achieves a 'spiritual reality' by becoming part of a greater 'duration' that overcomes conventional temporal organisation and structure (Deleuze 1986, 11).

From this basic dynamic, Deleuze defines the two terms that provide the titles for his film books and the foundation for his theoretical edifice. He contrasts 'movement-images which are mobile sections of duration' with 'time-images, that is duration-images, change-images, relation-images, volume-images which are beyond movement itself' (Deleuze 1986, 11). The movement-image, based on 'the interval between two movements or two actions,' can be viewed as an 'indirect image of time' that 'originates from montage, or from the composition of movement-images' (Deleuze 1986, 32).

In effect, Deleuze constructs a cinema of moving parts that becomes a vehicle for the transition to freeing the imagination from closed boundaries of thought. Lacking 'a centre of anchorage and of horizon,' the destabilising movement of film creates a world where image and movement become equal. This process of linked movement and change enables 'closed systems, finite sets' to become part of 'an infinite set' with spiritual promise (Deleuze 1986, 58, 59). Subsequent discussions in *The Movement-Image* by Deleuze consider Pascal's wager, 'spiritual choice' and 'choice as spiritual determination,' and 'extreme moralism' versus 'morality' (Deleuze 1986, 114, 116). Such ethical discourse suggests that for Deleuze, sets, movement, and assemblage become 'relations of great value between philosophy and the cinema' that in turn lead to relations of ethical and spiritual significance, a direction of thought that corresponds to Levinas's spiritual inclination (Deleuze 1986, 116).

Deleuze pursues his readings of films by such figures as Carl Theodor Dreyer and Robert Bresson to argue that the 'possible' and the 'spiritual' can be gained through the transformation of closed space, sets, and determined movements into a new kind of 'spiritual space.' So regarding Bresson, he says: 'we pass from a closed set that is fragmented to an open spiritual whole that is created or recreated,' while in Dreyer 'the Possible has opened up space as a dimension of the spirit' (Deleuze 1986, 117). He writes: '*Space is no longer determined, it has become the any-space-whatever which is identical to the power of the spirit,* to the perpetually renewed spiritual decision: . . . and which takes upon itself the linking of parts' (Deleuze 1986, 117).

In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze promotes the creative power of the direct time-image to usurp the predictable and conventional organisational structures of typical movement in film. With the time-image, as David Rodowick emphasises, Deleuze

pronounces the advent of a modern cinema that breaks with classic cinema's devoted allegiance to the restrictions and determination of a movement-image that subordinates time to movement (Rodowick 1997, 3–37). Deleuze writes: 'It took the modern cinema to re-read the whole of cinema as already made up of aberrant movements and false continuity shots. The direct time-image is the phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom' (Deleuze 1989, 41). In contrast to the 'actuality of the movement-image,' he describes the time-image as 'virtual' (Deleuze 1989, 41). He says: 'But, if virtual is opposed to actual, it is not opposed to real, far from it' (Deleuze 1989, 41).

Deleuze's thorough commitment to the fusion of materiality and image on the so-called 'plane of immanence' rethinks time and movement in film but conflicts with Levinasian transcendence (Deleuze 1986, 58–59). However, Deleuze's connection of time and movement in film to spirit provides an opening for a Levinasian understanding of time's relationship to ethics that also applies to film.

### **Ricoeur: Time, Narrative, and the Self**

While Deleuze opens film image and space to the possible and the spiritual with his complex theory of time and movement-images, Ricoeur's great work on time and narrative also compels a rethinking of the film frame, scene, and image for renewed ethical, philosophical, and political discourse. Throughout his study, Ricoeur emphasises the potential for narrative to structure and elucidate contradictory issues or aporias about time. To such difficulties as the contrast between intuitive or phenomenological time versus cosmological or world time, he brings 'the reply of the poetics of narrative' to engage 'the aporetics of time' (Ricoeur 1988, 242). To this ineluctable contradiction and dilemma of the 'initial great aporia, the aporia of a double perspective' on time, Ricoeur adds the problem of trying to unify into a 'collective singular' the so-called 'three ecstases of time – the future, the past, and the present' (Ricoeur 1988, 242, 243, 250). He concedes after much study 'the ultimate unrepresentability of time' and proposes that rather than try to resolve such irresolvable aporias regarding the inscrutability of time, it might prove more fruitful to put 'them to work', thereby 'making them productive' (Ricoeur 1988, 243, 261). In contrast, as part of his search for an ethical transcendence beyond being, for Levinas such paradoxes of time constitute what John Llewelyn calls 'the infinity of time' and 'a time of absolute diachrony' or change 'that effaces the

traces of the philosopher's footsteps and incessantly effaces the traces of the effacing' (Llewelyn 1995, 130, 148).

In Ricoeur's theory, several ways to put such dilemmas of time to work and make them productive also can prove applicable to a medium that goes largely unmentioned in his work on narrative – film. At least three areas of his study can be applied to film, beginning with his proposal for the refiguring of time through the interweaving of fiction and history. Another area concerns Ricoeur's discussion of 'connectors' or 'reflexive instruments', including documents and archives that help bring different levels of time together in narrative. A third area involves the organisation of time in terms of the tension between the dynamic space of experience and a horizon of expectation.

Ricoeur maintains that speaking about the experience of time requires the mediation of narrative. Proposing as 'our working hypothesis' that narrative serves 'as a guardian of time,' he insists that 'there can be no thought about time without narrated time' (Ricoeur 1988, 241). For Ricoeur, effective 'narrated time' interweaves history and fiction. From this interweaving, he argues, 'is born what we call human time, which is nothing more than narrated time' (Ricoeur 1988, 102). What Ricoeur terms 'this fiction-effect' of narrative's power to record history also helps history to see better, especially in regard to human suffering (Ricoeur 1988, 188). He says: 'Fiction gives eyes to the horrified narrator. Eyes to see and weep' (Ricoeur 1988, 188).

This interweaving of fiction and history finds strong resonance in film. Fiction on the screen and history on the screen similarly interweave and overlap as they do on the written page but with an important added dimension that connects film to a second aspect of Ricoeur's argument about how fiction and history refigure time. This concerns what Ricoeur describes as 'reflective instruments' or 'connectors of lived and universal time.' Citing archives, documents, and traces as examples, Ricoeur explains: 'These reflective instruments are noteworthy in that they play the role of connectors between lived time and universal time' (Ricoeur 1988, 104). Because it 'functions as a trace left by the past', the document for Ricoeur becomes especially important as a connector that operates on a 'fault line' involving history and time (Ricoeur 1988, 118, 123). In regard to the importance of the document to history, for many the photographic image constitutes a form of documentation. The inherent documentary nature of the filmic space and image blurs for film 'the dividing line between history and fiction' that the 'recourse to documents' suggests (Ricoeur 1988, 142).

A model for time and change in the form of the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectations” that Ricoeur derives from Reinhart Koselleck works especially well as a dramatic structure for the operation of time in film (Ricoeur 1988, 208). For film, the space of experience readily translates into the scene or film frame, while the horizon of expectation graphically suggests not only historical change but the incessant movement of the film frame and image. Significantly, Ricoeur’s description of movement and change within the layered space of experience compares to the dynamic composition of the film frame and to the archeology of the cinematic image of multiple layers of historical, psychological and social meaning. The concepts of space and horizon refer to more than spatial and movement dynamics but also become for Ricoeur ‘metahistorical categories’ that relate to ‘political and ethical duty’, making Ricoeur’s theory an ally to the argument that in film aesthetic issues about movement, space and time invariably become ethical ones (Ricoeur 1988, 258).

Time continues as fundamental to ethics for Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another*, a culminating work in his career and a vital study of contemporary ethics. For Ricoeur ‘temporality’ as a ‘primary trait of the self’ helps determine two basic meanings of identity that will become crucial in his ethics and his relation to Levinas, namely identity as immutable sameness or ‘*idem*’ versus identity as ‘*ipse*’ or ‘selfhood’ and ‘self-constancy,’ an identity based on “responsibility” and “being accountable for” one’s actions (Ricoeur 1992, 2, 165).

Interestingly, in thinking about Levinas, Ricoeur finds that ‘the distinction I propose between two sorts of identity, that of *ipse* and that of *idem*, cannot be taken into account’ because Levinas, he says, formulates ‘an ontology of totality’ for the ‘identity of the Same’ that becomes so encompassing as to stifle the exchange and interaction between the same and the other (Ricoeur 1992, 335). Nevertheless, in contrast with his reading of Levinas, for Ricoeur, this interaction between the two kinds of identity helps structure time in the form of narrative and narrative identity so as to articulate ‘a hermeneutics of the self’ and engender an ‘ethical level’ and ‘moral identity’ (Ricoeur 1992, 318, 167).

## Levinas

Accordingly, while some aspects of their philosophies, such as the focus on ethics, morality, time, and responsibility, can associate Ricoeur with Levinas, a great deal also separates them. As Richard A. Cohen writes: ‘No one more than Levinas has made the

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relation of self to other, as ethics, more central to philosophy. And now in *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur, too, wants to highlight the ethical character of selfhood and its intimate relation to the alterity of other persons' (Cohen 2002, 127). Cohen also asserts, however, that 'the differences separating Ricoeur and Levinas are sharp' and adds that 'Levinas and Ricoeur are so far apart when it comes to the fundamentals of their respective ethical theories' (Cohen 2002, 129, 157). Thus, while Ricoeur defines ethical and moral identity in terms of a complex, multi-layered, rigorously detailed, and tightly structured hermeneutics, he finds Levinas engaged in an argument of such extreme alterity, otherness, and responsibility to the point of exuding '*hyperbole*' and '*excess*' (Ricoeur 1992, 337).

In spite of such differences, Ricoeur's insights into time, narrative, identity and selfhood can strengthen the effort from a Levinasian perspective to find a temporality in experience and film in which ethics precedes ontology. Both Deleuze and Ricoeur can help articulate a temporal dimension in film to sustain a Levinasian time of ethical exigency. They all seek a new time. Thus, in conjunction with the work of Deleuze and Ricoeur on time and ethics, Levinasian metaphysics has the potential for presenting an alternative to André Bazin's classic theory of cinema ontology in the form of an ethically-based appreciation of film. Such an effort to conceive of a non-ontological approach to film compares to Levinas's overall attempt to counter ontological language. This endeavour involves Levinas in a classic dilemma of using language to escape language. As Adriaan Peperzak says: 'Levinas struggles to develop a non-ontological language in order to express the beyond of being, but in doing so he uses the very same language to overcome it' (Peperzak 1996, xi). A Levinasian ethical, non-ontological approach to film would work well with Deleuze and Ricoeur to reconsider time and ethics in film.

Time helps to energise and structure Levinasian thought. For example, synchronic and diachronic time play a key role in Levinasian ethics that extends to such concepts as alterity, transcendence, the same and other, the face, and proximity. Synchronic time – the regular, abstract time of the clock and the calendar – contrasts with and complements diachronicity, the time of disruption and change. The diachronic offers a different, distanced perspective on ordinary synchronicity that enables the construction of an ethical challenge. The synchronic and diachronic define each other.

Thus, in his Preface to *Time and the Other*, Levinas acknowledges the indispensability of the 'thread' and the '*always*' of synchronic time, while in 'Diachrony and Representation', he emphasises that synchronicity 'congeals into the abstraction of

the synchronous' (Levinas 1987, 32, 103). The synchronic becomes deadened forms of ontological accounting that 'constitute the rationality of an already derived order' (Levinas 1987, 104). Synchronicity, therefore, connotes sameness, unexamined values and ideas, and ethical conformity. However, synchronicity for Levinas also functions as a springboard for diachronic temporality, the time that surges toward transcendence, infinity, and originality, the very opposite of synchronous deadness. Thus, synchronicity serves the creativity and originality of the diachronic.

As a counter movement to the sameness, linearity, and continuity of every day synchronicity, the diachronic, Levinas argues, makes ethical thinking possible, transcendence tenable, and infinity believable. In 'Essence and Disinterestedness', Levinas describes this time of transcendence and ethics as 'recuperable temporalization', a signal for 'a lapse of time that does not return, a diachrony refractory to all synchronization, a transcending diachrony' (Levinas 1996, 116). In this ungovernable, irascible temporal dimension, the diachronic approaches infinity. Levinas says in 'The Old and the New' that his 'profoundest thought, which bears all thought, my thought of the infinite older than the thought of the finite, is the very diachrony of time, non-coincidence, dispossession itself' (Levinas 1987, 137).

While for Deleuze, new thinking about time opens a spiritual dimension to film and for Ricoeur time becomes key to an ethical self, for Levinas diachronic time establishes the separation to sustain the otherness that ethics demands. As he says, time 'in its dia-chrony would signify a relationship that does not compromise the other's alterity' (Levinas 1987, 31). Through diachronic time the other resists incorporation into another's being and identity. The pluralism that diachronic time helps create imposes separation from the other so 'that the other is in no way another myself, participating with me in a common existence', a theme that recalls Ricoeur's argument with Levinas on the importance of the exchange between the self and the self as another (Levinas 1987, 75).

Diachronic time also transforms what Levinas in 'Substitution' calls the 'ontological adventure' (Levinas 1996, 86) into 'the ethical adventure of the relationship to the other person' (Levinas 1987, 33). In the 'ethical adventure' a new way of looking occurs concomitantly with a new way of thinking about being and ethics. Such thinking and looking help structure and sustain otherness in the context of ethical discussion. Rather than overwhelming the other with certitude and authority, vision and thought in Levinasian ethics involves awareness of the unseen, the unknown, the transcendence of

'the face'. It recognises the humanity of the other in the face of the other. In a similar  
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vein, Levinas considers the diachronic to be a spiritual time that differs from abstract time and consciousness. He writes: 'Dia-chrony is a structure that no thematizing and interested movement of consciousness—memory or hope—can either resolve or recuperate in the simultaneities it constitutes' (Levinas 1987, 137).

The conceptual and critical systems and methodologies of Deleuze and Ricoeur on time, movement, and narrative help to make Levinas's ideas operational, so to speak, for film. Operational ability, of course, does not mean that Levinasian concepts such as synchronicity and diachronicity, transcendence and alterity, infinity, and the face will equate directly into any of the arsenal of terms and theories that come from Deleuze and Ricoeur such as the movement or time-image or the contrast between differing temporalities. Rather, the work of Deleuze and Ricoeur projects a critical strategy of terms and instruments on time for example, among other ideas, that can translate between Levinasian ethics and film structures. Thus, the work of all three thinkers in their different ways can operate together in a systematic effort to relate aesthetic to ethical issues in film.

### **The Cinema of Redemption**

Armed with an understanding of how Deleuze, Ricoeur, and Levinas can inform the encounter between ethics and aesthetic issues in film, it becomes possible to discern and analyse a pattern of this engagement that suggests a Cinema of Redemption that occurred in the United States from about the 1930s to about 1960. It could be argued that the films in the Cinema of Redemption literally enact and promulgate a Levinasian ethical position. The films in this group invariably centre on a moment of moral crisis and conversion of personal belief and action for a hero who adopts an ethical code that resonates with Levinasian ethics on the level of popular culture expression. This change involves an abnegation and sacrifice of the self, almost at times to the point of martyrdom, in favour of the ethical priority of the other. It proclaims absolute responsibility for the other. As Levinas said to Poirié: 'The I subordinated to other. In the ethical event, someone appears who is the subject par excellence' (Robbins 2001, 46). Some films and directors that exemplify this pattern of ethical priority of the other over the self include Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) as well as his *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942), Robert Rossen's *Body and Soul* (1947) and *The Hustler* (1961), Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* (1948), and Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954). As this list indicates, Jimmy Stewart and John

Garfield star in several of these films and could serve as icons or poster children for the Cinema of Redemption.

In many of the films of the Cinema of Redemption, the hero often experiences a different dimension of time that suggests an ethical realm that breaks from ordinary life. This new experience demands different ways of thinking, looking and ultimately living. Thus, often in these works, a film aesthetic of temporal disjunction and incommensurability dramatises a conflict of contrasting ethical orders that leads ultimately to renewal and rebirth. Ricoeur's work on time, narrative and the self and Deleuze's theories of the movement-image and the time-image contribute much to understanding and using time in the Cinema of Redemption.

From the perspective of Levinasian ethics, time from beyond being can infuse the Cinema of Redemption with a spirit and force for regeneration. For Levinas, a diachronic dimension of immemorial time engenders and supports the possibility of an ethics of transcendence. The significance of time for transcendent ethical experience and conversion in these films and life relates to what Levinas described for Poirié as 'the ethical order, or the order of holiness, or the order of compassion, or the order of love, or the order of charity, where the other man concerns me—independently of the place that is given to him in the multiplicity of humans' (Robbins 2001, 50). This ethical order that Levinas describes assumes a different temporal order to support such powerful ethical qualities as 'holiness', 'compassion', and 'love'. Levinas insists on a time that connects each one to infinity, a concession to a force greater than being that makes each one more than a number in a group or simply dates on a chronological calendar of life. Such a notion of spiritual time helps to make Levinasian 'holiness' and the sanctity of the other possible. In other words, to use Ricoeur's characterisation of Levinas's famous term, 'the face' of the other provokes something like an 'epiphany' of the humanity of the other (Ricoeur 1992, 189). For Levinas, the notion of the face and the face-to-face encounter signifies the strongest expression of the spiritual dimension in human experience. A published and noted Talmudic scholar, Levinas avoids theological and sectarian argument in his ethical writing. Similarly, a religious sensibility of absolute responsibility and ethical priority imbues the Cinema of Redemption without turning these films into narrow, sectarian cinema.

The idea of redemption in Levinas that elucidates its meaning for the Cinema of Redemption contrasts strongly with redemption as articulated in church orthodoxy and practice. For Levinas redemption involves what Llewelyn calls 'the temporality of

recuperable time' (Llewelyn 2000, 129) and 'regenerated time' (Llewelyn 2000, 205). For Levinas such time becomes 'messianic time.' As Levinas writes:

Truth requires both an infinite time and a time it will be able to seal, a completed time. The completion of time is not death, but messianic time, where the perpetual is converted into eternal. Messianic triumph is the pure triumph; it is secured against the revenge of evil whose return the infinite time does not prohibit (Levinas 1969, 285).

Levinas then asks: 'Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness?' and coyly confesses that 'The problem exceeds the bounds of this book' (Levinas 1969, 285). However, Llewelyn nicely completes this thought in a way that expresses the relationship of Levinasian 'messianism' to the concept of redemption. He writes:

The Messiah of this messianism is not someone expected to come and bring about the end of history, but the human being acknowledging responsibility toward other human beings at this very moment. The Messiah is me, accused and categorized, summoned to appear as witness to the other . . . . (Llewelyn 2000, 129–130).

Indeed, Levinas himself provides confirmation of this argument of the universality of redemption by interpreting 'a magnificent meditation of Jean Paul II' to mean that God 'would be incarnated not solely in Christ but through Christ in all men.' He says: 'This divine filiality of humanity is nothing new for Jews: the divine paternity experienced by Jewish piety, as it has been formulated since Isaiah, should be taken literally' (Robbins 2001, 109).

However, concomitant with the emphasis on the soul and spirituality, the films of the Cinema of Redemption also reflect some ambiguities about gender, women, and race that for some scholars also have manifested themselves as a controversial aspect of Levinasian thought. Redemption often seems restricted to white men in these films. In conflict around the world during these years with the totalitarian regimes and ideologies of Nazi fascism and Soviet Stalinism, America's battle with such forces externalised an internal struggle on ethical and political grounds for national redemption that required achieving true freedom and equality for women and minorities at home. Interestingly, the reflection in the Cinema of Redemption of an American ideology that melds individual redemption with the fulfillment of national symbolism and mission also parallels

Levinas's association of redemption in *In the Time of the Nations* and *Beyond the Verse* with the move from the earthly city to the sanctified New Jerusalem of Israel.

The embodiment of the double journey and struggle for individual and national redemption, Jimmy Stewart in Frank Capra's classics, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *It's a Wonderful Life*, carries the burden in both movies of transforming a personal narrative of conversion into a national narrative of transformation. Both movies entail time experiments that dramatise ethical and temporal themes. In addition, such thinkers as Deleuze, Ricoeur, and Levinas insinuate fresh insight and understanding about such issues as time, ethics, and morality in these classic films.

From the beginning of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the selection of Smith (Stewart) to replace a deceased senator to represent his state conveys a sense of election or chosenness that goes beyond the usual understanding of these words. Children have intervened on Smith's behalf to convince their father, the state's governor, of Smith's special qualities that make him an inevitable choice. The governor flips a coin that lands on its edge by a newspaper article about Smith, thereby casting into oblivion the governor's two other choices. Smith comes to embody a Levinasian understanding of election as every human being's call to ultimate responsibility for the other. Levinas insists: 'Within responsibility there is election, the original constitution of the I, and the revelation of its ethical meaning. I am chosen' (Robbins 2001, 192). Also, an example of a kind of Deleuzian time-image with philosophical and ethical implications occurs during a montage of Smith's tour of Washington, D.C. sites when John Hancock's dead hand of the past comes alive to escape from the restrictions of movement, space and ordinary time to sign the Declaration of Independence.

In one of the film's most powerful visual and rhetorical expressions of time and its relationship to ethics, Stewart pleads in the Senate chamber with Senator Joseph Paine (Claude Rains) who has betrayed him. Nearing the end of almost twenty-four hours of filibustering, Stewart is filmed and framed by Capra from below with the large Senate clock over his shoulders, signifying a crucifixion by ordinary temporality. Smith must somehow reverse that burden and overcome the tyranny of the deadly, chronological time of the clock. As Levinas says: 'To let time signify according to its diachrony, disengaged from the simultaneity through which knowledge would grasp it, is to think time under the figure of the ethical, under the figure of the responsibility for the other in the gratuitous generosity of love renouncing reciprocity' (Robbins 2001, 118). Smith must place time precisely 'under the figure of the ethical, under the figure of the

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responsibility for the other' to educate and reform other senators and the public. To compel such an ethical understanding of responsibility, Smith repeats in an exhausted whisper to Senator Paine the inescapable command to 'love thy neighbour'. Interestingly, Ricoeur sees in the 'secret of the commandment "Love thy neighbor as thyself"' a fundamental equivalence in ethics between 'the esteem of the *other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as an other*' (Ricoeur 1992, 194, 194 n. 32).

For Smith, the ethical achievement of seeing himself in terms of his responsibility to the other rather than to the moral narcissism of his naïve devotion to abstract ideals constitutes a form of resurrection. Standing alone against the mass in his commitment to a different temporality and transcendent ethics, Smith experiences regeneration in the wake of terrible despair and defeat. As Llewelyn writes:

So the future of temporality is not the ecstatic projection of possibility. Nor is it merely the future as measured by clocks, the future of a time rendered timeless by being construed according to the analogy of physical space whose limitations are exposed by both Heidegger and Bergson. (. . .) The future is the good infinite. Not the bad infinite of replicative repetition, but the good infinite of resurrection (Llewelyn 1995, 132).

Llewelyn concludes by quoting Levinas. Levinas writes: 'Resurrection constitutes the principal event of time. There is therefore no continuity in being. (. . .) In continuation the instant meets its death, and resuscitates; death and resurrection constitute time' (Levinas 1969, 284).

Of course, George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* also experiences such a resurrection through time. Bailey resurrects and redeems himself as an ethical person by rethinking and recreating his relationship to time and to others. The film enacts Llewelyn's argument that for both Heidegger and Levinas: 'Time is the meaning of being' (Llewelyn 1995, 66). When Bailey's guardian angel fulfills his wish of taking back his life as though he never had been born, Bailey suddenly finds himself without an identity to the point really of having a different body even though he actually looks the same. His deafness, which was caused by a heroic deed during his youth of saving his brother from drowning in a frozen lake, disappears. His bloodied and bruised lip that he had suffered from a blow from a man he earlier had insulted suddenly gets healed. Bailey thereby embodies Ricoeur's argument for the flesh as the frontier to the body and the world. However, Bailey also stands without an identity, an existence, and becomes the ultimate stranger to all those people he had known. In effect, Bailey therefore also

epitomises and enacts in his own person the contrast Ricoeur works so hard to develop between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood. This entails gaining a new appreciation for time. For George, as Ricoeur writes, 'temporality' becomes 'the exclusive theme of a mediation on authentic existence' (Ricoeur 1992, 328).

Such mediation through time occurs in several scenes in the film. When George meets his brother at the train station thinking that his brother will be assuming responsibilities to free George to live his own life, he discovers that the brother has taken on his own responsibilities after college by marrying and starting his own life. Capra shoots Stewart in a close-up with darkness and a shadow that cover his face. Stewart walks through his own time zone of change and defeat. Also, in the famous Christmas Eve scene when George goes home believing that he is headed for ruin and prison because of money that is missing from his loan company, Stewart encapsulates within his body and performance the ambiguities and conflicts of his existence and his experience in time. Embodying the multiple temporalities of Bailey's life – failure, father and solid citizen, flirtatious friend, frustrated and violent loser – Stewart physically expresses Bailey's crisis of what Ricoeur calls 'the reinscription of phenomenological time in cosmological time' (Ricoeur 1992, 326). Of course, through the love and help of his wife, Mary (Donna Reed), he ultimately resurrects his identity and redeems himself by gaining a new appreciation for his relationship with others.

Interestingly, the film opens with God adjusting a kind of lens onto the world to get a clear image of George as a youth. The film ends with George acquiring a new way of seeing the world that transforms both the world and himself. He sees what Llewelyn describes in a different context 'through the lens of the spiritual optics of Levinas's hypocritical ethics of responsibility' (Llewelyn 2000, 205).

As powerful as Jimmy Stewart's embodiment of this multiple struggle for individual and national redemption, John Garfield as Charlie Davis, a New York street kid, achieves money, fame, and success as a boxer and champion in *Body and Soul* but at a great moral and ethical cost to himself and others. Choosing to betray himself and the principles of those who love and have faith in him, Davis takes money to throw his last fight and lose his championship. Nearly too late, Charlie realises that rather than keep his word to let him leave the ring in relatively decent physical condition, Roberts (Lloyd Goff), the crooked boss, has told Charlie's mediocre opponent to surprise Charlie with a brutal beating that will help make the fixed fight look somewhat more legitimate.



Almost knocked out and beaten into unconsciousness and defeat, Davis enters into a groggy psychic state where time changes for him. His interior consciousness struggles against the structured, ordered, and coherent time of the boxing match of ten-count knockouts and three-minute rounds. In this multiple temporal dimension, Charlie experiences what Ricoeur describes as 'the aporia of a double perspective' of time in the contrast between phenomenological and cosmological time (Ricoeur 1988, 242). His mental state at this moment in the fight literally entails a view from his own different inner experience of time. In a kind of transfixed state in the ring, Charlie must find his own time. Like Jimmy Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, he must break the hold the clock has over him to realise the power of another order of time than synchronic sameness that means conformity and ethical indifference. Up until now he not only has thought of himself first before others, but as a sign of such self-centeredness, he really also has measured time in terms of his own potential end. He learns suddenly in the face of his existential crisis of self to think of death, the end of his own being in the world, in terms of infinity, a time greater than himself. In a moral battle consistent with the crisis of Levinasian ethics, Davis the champion boxer, by virtue of his own experience, comes to appreciate the meaning behind the 'invitation' from Levinas 'to think death on the basis of time, and no longer time on the basis of death' (Levinas 2000, 104). A kind of revelation occurs to Charlie that demands a search for more meaning to life than survival over the danger of impending annihilation and instead proffers another conception of time in the struggle to achieve a form of redemption.

In *Body and Soul*, Charlie must decide not just to retain or lose his championship but to gain or lose his soul, meaning in the Levinasian sense, to rethink his last chance to change his ethical relationship to others. In the film's concluding fight scene, Charlie decides to fight to win but only after his opponent's manager has pounded on the floor of the ring to signal a change in the tempo of the fight that will unleash the sudden surprise attack on him. Throughout the match, the minute by minute time of the fight clock punctuates and beats a kind of numbing awareness of the tyranny of time. Such actions suggest a Heideggerian dread of imminent doom marked by regulated, abstract time. The fight gives Davis a brutal lesson about time. As Levinas asserts: 'we have an opening of the time of suddenness, which is the *beating of the Other in the Same*' (Levinas 2000, 139). In other words, the different, disjunctive, and discordant experience of time conveys the paradox for Charlie of his inescapable separation from the other as well as his total responsibility to the other. Levinas recalls that the Hebrew for blow as in

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beat and for the striking of the clock derives from the same verb to agitate, thereby suggesting the need for finding another relationship to time. He proposes an understanding of time that involves more than simply being beaten moment by moment but instead recognises and accepts an immemorial time that supersedes the pressure of ordinary time and engenders a new relationship with the infinite. Accordingly, *Body and Soul* brilliantly dramatises the Levinasian theory of the relationship to death as part of the ethical responsibility to the time of the other and the priority of the other.

After leaving the ring victorious but bloodied and horribly bruised in his physical embodiment of sacrifice and moral martyrdom, Charlie faces Roberts, the boss who wanted him to throw the fight. Roberts asks Charlie how he thinks he can get away with beating the mob by winning the fight. Charlie declares: 'What are you going to do, kill me?' and repeats the boss's own ominous words from earlier in the film, 'Everyone dies!' He then tells his jubilant and morally vindicated girlfriend, Peg (Lilli Palmer), 'I never felt better in my life'. Broken and battered after losing his own bet against himself by winning rather than throwing the fight, Charlie's words constitute a testimony of revelation and redemption. The meaning of time and money has changed for him.

The films of the Cinema of Redemption generally belong to a particular era in America from the 1930s to the 1960s. However, the perdurability of this idea of redemption in film becomes evident in its emergence in several places, including Martin Scorsese's great body of work. Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Raging Bull* (1980) especially show the ethical and artistic relevance of this pattern of cinema in different times. As I emphasised elsewhere, for Scorsese the story of Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull* centered on the boxer's 'spiritual rebirth' and 'moral regeneration' by overcoming extraordinary obstacles of his own psychology and character as well as his environment (Girgus 2002, 84). In this film, the heavy concentration of Catholic imagery provides a background and impetus for his redemption outside the church. Scorsese's films suggest the importance to our own time of Levinasian ethical transcendence and the priority of the other in the effort to create moral meaning and identity.

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