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Let Me Interrupt!

Or,

Ethics after Ethical Violence:
Rethinking Levinas, Ethics and News Media

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Abstract

This paper develops a theory of journalism ethics centered on the concept of interruption, as formulated within Levinasian philosophical tradition. Breaking radically from traditional approaches in which focus on the successful transfer of objective information, the approach here centralizes the need for interrupting the flow of information. More specifically the concept of interruption is concerned with providing a space for voices that challenge dominant narratives on events, peoples, and issues. The news media, which are often the dominant or sole source through which many citizens come into contact with various events and peoples, are vital to establishing a “community of interruption,” one populated by a truly diverse multiplicity of voices; a community key to maintaining a vibrant democracy. Journalists are in a socio-political position well suited to facilitate and perform the practice of interruption. This formulation of journalism ethics is neither utopian nor post-political; it acknowledges and centralizes the fact that any ethical act toward one is often done at the expense of another, a reality with which every democracy must struggle.

The author would like to direct the reader's attention to the section from p. 14 to the end. For a better understanding of the Levinasian language used in this paper, please read pp. 9-14

In a recent essay, Stephen Ward (2009) outlines the key theoretical approaches to journalism ethics. In his piece, he concludes that there is a need for a “richer theoretical basis for journalism ethics” (p. 304). The aim of this paper is to provide exactly that by introducing a radically different approach to journalism ethics, one centered upon the concept of interruption. Interruption provides a space in which the “Other” can speak. This approach is steeped in Levinasian philosophy and borrows heavily from Amit Pinchevski’s (2003, 2005a, 2005b) development of the concept of interruption within this tradition. Levinas bases ethics in the Other and calls me to be responsible to and for the Other without deliberation. This approach is embodied in a single passive ethical imperative: “interrupt me” and seeks to foster a “community of interruption,” a community that allows for the Other to speak, to disturb our system(s) of signification. The “essence” then of such a conception of ethics is to disrupt, to unsettle. Here, in the application of this philosophy to an ethics of news media, the successful transmission of information is no longer the principle issue; rather, the primary concern is to create spaces in which the “Other” can speak. However, in order to adapt this philosophy toward an ethics that seeks to foster a community of interruption in which the news media plays a vital role, Levinas must be read critically. The unlimited responsibility for the Other must be problematized as the world is inhabited by a multitude of others and often, any ethical action towards one is often done at the expense of another. Ultimately, the analysis here argues that, in order to adapt Levinasian philosophy to an ethics of news media, the “Third” (the Other’s other) must be privileged over the Other and the passive ethical imperative “interrupt me” requires a complementary active imperative best stated as “let me interrupt!”

This paper begins with the question, do we need an(other) ethics of news media? Second, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas is illustrated to be an appropriate starting point. Third, major Levinasian concepts are outlined. Fourth, criticisms of his ethics are utilized (particularly Zizek, 2005) to highlight the issues mentioned above as well as suggest ways of correcting for them while maintaining the centrality of interruption. Finally, the remainder of the paper develops the active imperative “let me interrupt!” and the implications of this theory on several components of journalistic practice.

Do We Need An(other) Ethics of News Media?

In any attempt to formulate an ethics of news media, the first question must always be one of necessity. That is, is there a need for an ethics of news media? Recently, in a work that also borrows from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, Roger Silverstone (2007) took on this herculean task in order to tackle what he described as a crisis in world communication. This paper takes a less alarmist stance. Here, the answer to this question begins by outlining three characteristics of the news media environment.ⁱ First, as Couldry (2003) convincingly argues, media operate in a way that legitimizes what he calls the “Myth of the Mediated Centre”; that is, that there is a “natural” centre of social values and that the media “has a privileged relationship to that ‘centre’...[their] natural role is to represent or frame that ‘centre’” (p. 45). Second, for particular events and issues (e.g., international conflict, global finance), those concerning far-off, often faceless “others,” the news media are often the citizen’s sole source of information. Finally, the Liberal idealⁱⁱ of news media posits the “news” as an objectiveⁱⁱⁱ or neutral enterprise that requires the media – and the individual journalists therein – to act as disinterested conduits through which information passes (see: Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

Already, news media's privileged position vis-à-vis the "social centre" along with citizens' dependency on the news media for not only information but also for the "symbolic clusters" they use to understand their world (Lewis, 2001: p. 84) raises concerns regarding how news media go about "accessing" and constructing this "centre." The idea of objectivity is seen, ideally, as a safeguard here: by simply reporting the facts, the journalist attempts not to shape the news in any value laden way. This allows, ideally, for the citizen to make value judgments. While this conception of objectivity is highly problematic and indeed part of the initial concern of this paper, its proper explication, for my purposes here, must be done in conjuncture with the broader theoretical and/or phenomenological issues that are ignored within the Liberal ideal. These are laid out next.

The Liberal ideal of news media is based on a communication framework that is concerned almost solely with the successful transmission of information. Key to both the "myth of the mediated centre" and the ideal of objective media, is the assumption that material language can faithfully represent or capture its referent(s). This ignores what Pinchevski (2005a) calls, building on the insight of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, the limit or failure of communication. Material language, that which Levinas calls the Said – that is, the system of signification that upholds the signifier, signified, referent relationship (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 80) – much like the image, as Butler (2004) posits, cannot fully capture or represent its referent(s). In short, there is a limit of communication; it inherently fails.^{iv}

The Liberal ideal of news media, concerned with the circulation of information and objectivism, depends on, and more importantly assumes the possibility of, the disinterested journalist who employs a "reporting-only ethos" (see: Hallin and Mancini, 2004). While "there is a tremendous body of literature debunking [neutrality], showing that even where journalists

may be sincerely committed to a professional ideology of ‘objectivity,’ news incorporates values,” there is evidence that many journalists still strive for this ideal (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 26, 212). This ideal is parallel if not directly tied to what Arnett, Fritz and Holba (2007) call the “moderate enlightenment” idea of individualism that provides a “system of universal assurance through rationality” while ignoring the “multiplicity of traditions within which the human finds identity” (p. 117). The error of this individualism lays not so much in its focus on the individual but in its positing of the myth that an individual can stand above the fray (p. 118). Arentt et al., (2007) make it clear that this is not simply a theoretical concern but a phenomenological one (p. 124) and that one should not forget “the co-present interplay of the before, the after, and the now as each continues to reshape the other” (p. 120).

When concerned solely with the successful flow of objective information^v, any ethical discussion begins with the journalist and how she should shed her bias and strive for objectivity; the news media’s relation to the Other is relegated to a secondary concern. The issue here is that news media often deal with far-off “others” about which the citizen has limited means of obtaining information; these others must then be a primary concern.

It is these shortcomings – the failure to take into account the inherent limit of communication, the persistence of the moderate enlightenment ideal of individualism, and a lack of focus on the other – that together call for a new approach to an ethics of news media; a re-imagining of the shape such an ethics may take. The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas provides a fruitful starting point.

Levinas’ Philosophy as a Starting Point

Levinas (1969) aims at establishing ethics and morality not as a branch of philosophy but as first philosophy (p. 304); that is, not as supplementing a “preceding existential base” (Levinas

& Nemo, 1985, p. 95). Contrary to ontology, which seeks to “establish the structure of reality by the exploration of ‘what is’” (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 72), Levinas (1998) posits ethics as pre-ontological, as anterior to intuition and reason, preceding the *a priori*. He does this by challenging the privileged position of the Self in Western philosophy. Levinas breaks radically from the Western tradition by not simply respecting alterity^{vi} but by basing ethics not in the Self, but in the Other; he seeks to establish an ethics that apprehends the individual not in a generality but in *one’s* individuality, an approach that respects exteriority (Levinas, 1969, pp. 43-44). He does this by basing the Self’s very subjectivity in the Other. The Self is, in essence, what Arnett (2003) calls a “Responsive-I.” The Self is approached or called upon by the Other and thus is “response-able” to the Other. This “experience of alterity is the most fundamental experience of subjectivity. Subjectivity is subjection to the Other” (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 74). Hence, the “response-ability” toward the Other that arises in this experience is not a result of rational thought, cognition or reflection; rather it is the very basis of the Self’s subjectivity which in turn allows for thought and reflection (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 73). The Self’s experience of the Other is a relation that is *a priori* to any experience (Lingis, 1998, xxviii); a relation that exists in “a past more ancient than any present, a past which was never present” (Levinas, 1998, p. 24). The Other herself is outside of everything *a priori* (Levinas, 1998, p. 86).

This experience also escapes definition and incorporation (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 73); it precedes knowledge and signification. This is what Levinas means by a relation “otherwise than being” or “beyond essence”^{vii}: it is not to “be otherwise” or to “not-be,” for this relation does not negate the “I” or *being*. Rather it states “a difference over and beyond that which separates being from nothingness – the very difference of the beyond” (Levinas, 1998, p. 3). It is above anything that can be put into themes or signified. “Otherwise than being” is a relation “whose anarchical

antiquity was never given in the play of dissimulation and manifestations, a past whose other signification remains to be described, signifies over and beyond the manifestation of being” (Levinas, 1998, p. 24). Hence, to thematize this relation would be to reduce it to ontology, and for Levinas (1969, p. 42), ontology betrays the radical alterity of the Other and reduces it to the Same. This subjection to the Other “beyond essence” is what makes the Other our primary ethical concern; I am response-able *to* and *for* the Other.

It is clear that in his exposition of his theory of ethics, Levinas recognizes – and this is also at the very core of his philosophy – that the radical alterity of the Other (as well as the Self’s experience of it, outlined above) cannot be communicated within a totality, it “overflows essence” (even though one’s subjectivity is based in the Other). That is, this primordial phenomenon resists thematization; it cannot be expressed or represented in any system of signification. Here, not only does Levinas acknowledge the limit or failure of communication, but for him it is at this limit that our concern and responsibility for the Other begins (Pinchevski, 2005b, pp. 211-2).^{viii} Also, Levinas’ philosophy eschews the moderate enlightenment notion of individualism, and radically so, in that the individual’s very subjectivity is rooted in the Other (who is also the Self’s primary ethical concern); “subjectivity is ethically heteronomous” (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 74). While some of the language and concepts Levinas uses (i.e., “beyond essence,” “otherwise than being,” and “anarchical antiquity”) may suggest that “response-ability” is limited to a purely theoretical level, Arnett (2003) makes clear that for Levinas’ ethics are phenomenological, not purely theoretical. The “I” is a social fact that “finds identity and shape in the Other” (Arnett, 2003, p. 40). In the world one is called on by the face of the Other.^{ix} Hence, one must be “response-able” for the Other *in* the world: “if one does not take care of the Other, there is no ‘I’” (Arnett, 2003, p. 41).

Levinas' philosophy corrects for the shortcomings above. Not only does Levinas recognize the limit of communication, posit an individual outside of the ideal of individualism outlined above, and give the Other a privileged position, but these are at the very basis of his ethics; they are the starting point. His ethics also inherently reject communication frameworks that seek to either unite sender and receiver by resolving difference or simply achieve successful transmission or circulation of information (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 11). This, for Levinas and Pinchevski, is an assault on the "irreducible difference between Self and Other" (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 7).

This formulation of ethics presents a challenge when one attempts to adopt it into a context that is primarily concerned with the successful transmission of information, is dominated by a "reporting-only" ethos (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), privileges objectivity (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Soley, 1992; Strentz, 1978) and involves the demotion of analysis and contextualization (Bourdieu, 1996; McChesney, 2004).^x Any media ethics based on Levinas' philosophy radically challenges the status quo. Also, when applying ethics as first philosophy, questions are raised concerning the phenomenological nature of this "response-ability" for the Other, how to put it into practice, its consequences and even its suitability for a complex social world. To arrive at an ethics of news media that answers the above questions and begins in Levinas' philosophy, the major concepts of Levinas' work and of Pinchevski's development of them must be treated in a critical manner. This will include taking seriously both the criticisms of Levinas' work and the work of other scholars, who have developed Levinasian concepts that were not central to Pinchevski's rereading.

The following examination and subsequent formulation of a theory of an ethics of news media is not one that will dogmatically adhere to Levinas' philosophy. In fact, navigating

through Levinas, his proponents (especially Pinchevski) and his critics leads to privileging concepts that significantly alters Levinas' key tenets, but are necessary in adopting his philosophy, even if modified, towards an ethics of news media that is appropriate for a complex social world.

Concepts

The Other & Responsibility/Response-ability

The other person as he comes before me in a face to face encounter is not an *alter ego*, another self with different priorities and accidents but in all essential respects like me. This may be the expression of an optimistic hope from a self-centered point of view which is often verified. The other may, indeed, turn out to be, on the surface at least, merely an analogue of myself. But not necessarily! I may find him to be inhabiting a world that is basically other than mine and to be essentially different from me. He is not a mere object to be subsumed under one of my categories and given a place in my world (Wild, 1969, p. 13: Introduction to *Totality and Infinity*).

As this passage exemplifies, the Self and the Other are forever differentiated and to make them inherently the same is to betray their alterity. However, even with this insurmountable gap, our interaction with the Other is crucial; as mentioned, one's tie to the Other is the basis of subjectivity. Levinas states: "My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world...the other's right to exist has primacy over my own" (Levinas and Kearney, 1986, cited in Butler, 2004). Here, Levinas discards the tenet of self-preservation that is so deeply ingrained in Western philosophy. The primacy of the Other is what makes one responsible to and for the Other.

Responsibility here has a very different meaning than its mundane definition. Response-ability stands for our duty to respond when the Other interrupts us. Responsibility means to exceed rather than meet social norms (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 74). This is a responsibility "without deliberation, and without the compulsion of truths in which commitments arise, without

certainty. This responsibility commits me, and does so before any truth or any certainty” (Levinas, 1998, p. 120). Consequently we can see that this responsibility does not correspond with universal rules or duties (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 75). It exists only where there is real responding – where we are responding *to* and *for* the Other. As the primacy of the Other suggests, this responsibility is not reciprocal – at least, reciprocity is not guaranteed. Levinas often highlights this non-symmetrical relation by quoting Dostoyevsky: “Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others” (cited in Levinas, 1998, p. 146).^{xi} In other words, in Levinasian ethics, self-preservation is no longer the primary concern and hence, the presence/absence of, or one’s desire for, reciprocity cannot affect whether or not one is responsible to the Other: “I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity... Reciprocity is *his* affair” (Levinas & Nemo, 1985, p. 98, *emphasis* in original).

Here, questions already begin to arise concerning the consequences of such responsibility. The dangers of such a relation with the Other are highlighted by Zizek’s (2005) explication of Hector Babenco’s *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. However, before this can be adequately explored further, other major Levinasian concepts need to be addressed.

The Face & Proximity

The Other approaches us and interrupts us with a face. This is not a human face, but can be manifested in the human face as well as a variety of physical phenomena (Levinas, 1969, p. 262; Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 76, *fn* 5). Levinas uses the example of Vassili Grossman’s *Life and Fate* to illustrate this: “Persons approaching the counter had a particular way of craning their neck and their back, their raised shoulders with shoulder blades like springs, which seemed to cry, sob, and scream” (cited in Butler, 2004, p. 133). However, the face itself is not physical at all:

I do not know if one can speak of a phenomenology of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears....I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that (Levinas & Nemo, 1985, pp. 85-86; see also: Levinas, Wright, Hughes & Ainley, 1988, p. 171).

The face is the bearer of the Other's radical alterity and hence, is something that cannot be encompassed or put into a theme; it "is neither seen nor touched" (Levinas, 1969, p. 194). Therefore, while "the relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception," (Levinas et al., 2001, p. 208) "at each moment [the face] destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me" (Levinas, 1969, p. 51).

The face is a "non-concept" (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 76, *fn* 5), it is a "living presence; it is expression" (Levinas, 1969, p. 66). Its signature consists of making an entry (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 101). The face interrupts and calls one out of narcissism (Butler, 2004, p. 138). It can do so because only the face can "speak" (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 77). The concepts of interruption and Saying are important to Levinas' philosophy, Pinchevski's rereading of it, and to my argument here. They will be examined further in the sections below. However, we must first turn to proximity as the face speaks (not verbally) by coming into proximity with us.

This proximity is closeness that reifies difference (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 79); it maintains the irreducible gap between the Self and the Other – differences touch but do not merge (Pinchevski, 2005b, p. 219). Just as the face does not denote a physical face, proximity here does not imply a physical nearness, closeness in time and space or structure of any kind^{xii}: "proximity does not enter into the common time of clocks, which makes meetings possible" (Levinas, 1998, p. 89). Instead, it is "a restlessness, null site, outside of the place of rest. It

overwhelms the calm of the non-ubiquity of a being which becomes a rest in a site” (p. 82); “It is a disturbance” (p. 89). If proximity is a disturbance, than we must understand that it also does not imply a greater “understanding” of the Other; that is, a closeness in knowledge. Increased knowledge, familiarity or understanding cannot reduce distance, but re-replaces the Other within a theme and recontextualizes the face in a particular semiotic framework within the Said.^{xiii} The more one is informed the less one is responsible to and for the Other (Pinchevski, 2005a, pp. 78-9).^{xiv} This failure to capture the referent’s alterity is the limit of communication; and it is at this limit of communication where our concern and our responsibility for the Other begins (Pinchevski, 2005b, pp. 211-2).

The idea of this proximity as a disturbance is key to understanding the possibilities of adapting Levinas’ philosophy not only to communication – as Pinchevski (2005a, 2005b, 2003) aptly did – but also to an ethics of news media. To understand this disturbance, this interruption, we must examine Levinas’ concepts of the Said and Saying and subsequently Pinchevski’s positioning of interruption.

The Saying and the Said

Stated most simply the Said is a noun while the Saying is a verb (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 82). More complexly, the Said is of material language and upholds the signifier, signified, referent relationship. While the Said is about designating (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 80), it is important to note that it “is not simply a sign or an expression of meaning; it proclaims and establishes ‘this as that’” (Levinas, 1998, p. 35). Due to the fact that Said is a system of signification (nouns, naming and identifying), it cannot represent the addressing face. Therefore, communication cannot be reduced to the transfer of information (because the addressing face does indeed communicate) and language cannot be reduced to the Said. It is the Saying that goes

beyond the thematization of the Said (Levinas, 1998, p. 37). It is a modality of approach to an other; “Language qua Saying is an expression of relation, of drawing close to the Other, of proposing a proposition to the Other (Pinchevski, 2005a, pp. 81-2), that does not “consist in giving signs” (Levinas, 1998, p. 48).

The relationship between these two concepts is interesting and complex. Pinchevski (2005b) states that language is originally for-the-Other, but that it is later brought into a system of signs and designation. Hence, the “Said is a fixing and a silencing of the saying that makes it significant. The ethical structure is completely covered over by the exhibition of the world... [However] the saying cannot be utterly obliterated under the said. It is also conveyed nonetheless in this unfaithful text” (Lingis, 1998, p. xliii).

It is here that we can see an interesting paradox of sorts in Levinas’ thought. Not only does the Said also convey the Saying – however unfaithfully – but, and as Levinas also admits, the Saying requires the Said. The Saying needs a Said in order to realize its signification; it requires a Said in order to mark itself as the Said’s beyond (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 87). Hence, the Saying and Said are interdependent and, as mentioned, the Saying can appear only as a certain betrayal of itself through the Said. If we remember that Levinas states that increased knowledge, familiarity or understanding cannot reduce distance, and that it is in fact an assault on the irreducible alterity of the Other, along with the fact that the Said is inescapable, one can ask whether it is at all possible to act ethically.

Therefore, since we live in a world that, not just as Levinas claims, is dominated by the Said, but requires it, are we doomed to de-differentiate the other? Or, as Butler states, should our representations in the Said acknowledge the failure or betrayal of the Saying (Butler, 2004, p.

144)? An examination of interruption along with the further development of my argument, will allow us to answer these questions.

Interruption

The concept of interruption does not have a central position in Levinas' work. Rather, it is developed more thoroughly in the work of Amit Pinchevski (2003, 2005a, 2005b). Interruption occurs in the puncturing of the Said by the Saying, "in the constant tension between the potential of language to thematize and its primary modality as a response-ability toward the Other... [it is] what is denied in the discourse of the Said" (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 11). It is an interruption of rapport (p. 101) and neither "an inclusion nor an exclusion" (p. 12). Thus, it is interruption that allows the Other to retain his or her singularity, one that is outside of any context or system of signification (p. 12); interruption reduces the Said to the Saying, to "the unrepresentable relation, contact or touch" through which the face of the Other addresses the "I" (p. 11). As stated above, it is only the face that can speak. That is, only the face can address in Saying. Therefore, it is the face that interrupts and brings one into proximity with the Other. This gives rise to a relation "that transcends both juxtaposition and synthesis, and transpires within the difference between Self and Other" (p. 101). It gives rise to the primary ethical asymmetrical relation of responsibility to and for the Other.

The "Essence" of Ethics

In outlining the major concepts of Levinasian ethics, Pinchevski's development of them and the latter's subsequent privileging of interruption, the nature of the theory of ethics established in this line of work becomes clear: "Ethics does not have an essence, its 'essence,' so to speak, is precisely not to have an essence, to unsettle essences... Ethics is precisely ethics by disturbing the complacency of being" (Cohen, 1985, p. 10, Introduction to *Ethics and Infinity*;

see also: Levinas, 1998, p. 14). We live in a social world saturated by and established through material language (the Said). The Other addresses me as a face (in Saying), thus puncturing the Said and interrupts my complacency in being, my, as Levinas refers to it, “for-oneself” (see: Levinas, 1998). The face provokes or commands my response not through *what* it says, but through “the very fact of its address” (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 77). It is to this Other who addresses me, who is first and foremost my master and teacher (Levinas, 1969, p. 99), that I am ethically obligated to respond without deliberation, without expecting reciprocity, abandoning “all alibis given by the State, law or religion, or acquired through knowledge and experience” (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 91); that is my response-ability to and for the Other. I am ethically bound to respond to the Other, the one in whom my own subjectivity is based^{xv}, as her right to exist is given primacy over my own. This is “empitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other” (Levinas and Kearney, 1986, cited in Butler, 2004, p. 132).^{xvi} It is this theory of ethics, in which my subjectivity is based in the Other, who commands me as master and interrupts me from my complacency in being, that ethical action is established through renouncing all imperatives “except for the two words ending Jacques Derrida’s text on Levinas: ‘Interrupt me’” (Derrida, 1991, cited in Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 101).

The above imperative captures the radical passivity of Levinas’ response-ability.^{xvii} For Levinas, the “approach of the other is an initiative I undergo. I am passive in regard to it” (Lingis, 1998, p. xxiii); “being-for-another” is a passive position (Levinas, 1998, p. 62). This responsibility runs deep. It is “unlimited” (p. 10) and “to-be-for-another... is to take the bread out of one’s own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one’s own fasting” (p. 56). Indeed, I am responsible for the Other’s very responsibility (Levinas & Nemo, 1985, p. 96).

It is here that I can finally address a concern regarding the consequences of applying such an unlimited and passive responsibility to the social world, as mentioned above. This concern is best illustrated in Zizek's (2005) criticism of Levinasian ethics. Zizek uses Babenco's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* to illustrate his point:

A high Gestapo officer explains to his French mistress the inner truth of the Nazis, how they are guided in what may appear brutal military interventions by an inner vision of breathtaking goodness. We never learn in what, exactly, this inner truth and goodness consist; all that matters is this purely formal gesture of asserting that things are not what they seem (brutal occupation and terror), that there is an inner ethical truth which redeems them (Zizek, 2005, p. 184).

This example makes clear the dangers of an unlimited responsibility towards the Other, a responsibility “without deliberation and without the compulsion of truths.” The passive imperative of “Interrupt me” does little here in promoting, at least explicitly, ethical action in such a situation. There are two main reasons for this: that the imperative above is focused solely on the I-Other relation and it relegates the Said to a position of secondary importance. The reader can only recognize what is offsetting about an unlimited responsibility for the Other in the example above because of historical knowledge (located within the Said) and the knowledge of a Third, the Other's other. This is precisely Daniel Dayan's (2007) critique of Silverstone's *Media and Morality*. Dayan argues that the Other has an other who is not me, that “[i]nstead of pairs, there are at least triangles” (p. 120). Levinas admits of the possibility for the Self and Other to ignore everyone else and form a sort of love-couple (Simmons, 1999, p. 92). Even if one were to contend, that it were the Jewish people, the victims of the Nazis, that are the true Other in this scenario, one must have a way to distinguish, to judge that this is so; one needs knowledge and signification. In the fifth chapter of *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas (1998) introduces the concept of the Third, and that it is with the Third that we are brought into the Said, and into justice. This concept is crucial in adapting Levinas' philosophy toward an ethics of news media.

Before I continue to develop why this is so, and consequently privilege the concept of the Third, over other Levinasian concepts, it is necessary to outline, if only quickly, why an ethics that eschews all imperatives other than “Interrupt me” is inadequate for an ethics of news media.

Attempting to establish an ethics of news media using Levinas’ philosophy as I have outlined it above is quite problematic. Levinas philosophy states that the Said does violence to the singularity of the Other. To represent the Other solely in the Said is to make Same its radical alterity. The fact that the Said is that which the news media operate within seems to create an impasse. Furthermore, some scholars, (Bourdieu, 1996; McChesney 2004) suggest the need for a news media that provides analysis and that contextualizes its stories. This, however, does not move past the problem of the Said. More importantly, while basing ethics in the Other provides important theoretical insight into journalistic practice – that is, it prevents any formulation of ethics from simply focusing on the journalist – the isolated I-Other relationship and the accompanying unlimited responsibility create other problems. Who, for the journalist, is the Other? Is a “source” the Other? If so, then we see the same problem in unlimited responsibility toward the Other, as highlighted by Zizek’s example above; that is, there is always a Third.^{xviii} What then is the news media to do in order to be an ethical institution?

To proceed we must acknowledge the limits of a theory based on and about face-to-face communication between two people (in the Levinasian sense and the more common Media Studies usage). If the goal is to think about the news media, something both Levinas and Pinchevski mention only briefly, the context of the discussion must be broadened. Key to this expansion of context is the concept of *le tiers*, The Third.

The Third

Levinas mentions the Third party within *Totality and Infinity* but does not go into the concept in depth until he introduces it in the fifth Chapter of *Otherwise Than Being* (though he does refer to the Third in footnotes throughout). The brief mention in *Totality and Infinity* posits the Third as standing for all of humanity and as internal or existing within the face of the Other: “The third party looks at me through the eyes of the Other” (Levinas, 1969, p. 213). In *Otherwise Than Being*, the concept is somewhat more complex in that there are passages that seem to support a definition of the Third similar to that in *Totality and Infinity*, while others point to a phenomenological Third man. Levinas alludes to the fact, and Zeillinger (2009) interprets it this way, that the Third is indeed *not* a third individual. In one passage Levinas refers to the fact that the Infinite (that which overflows Totality) signifies in the third person. However, he distinguishes this from the third man: “This ‘thirdness’ is different from that of the third man, it is the third party that interrupts the face to face of a welcome of the other man, interrupts the proximity or approach of the neighbor, it is the third man with which justice begins” (p. 150). Here, Levinas defines the ‘third’ that one looks at me through the eyes of the Other, that signifies the Infinite as a ‘thirdness’ while the concept of the Third proper is phenomenological: “The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow” (Levinas, 1998, p. 157). Levinas’ own reference to the Third as a human being within interviews supports this.^{xix} This supports Arnett’s (2003) observation that Levinas’ ethics are phenomenological. In this paper, the aim is to establish an ethic of news media and hence, the Third as phenomenological is of great import and concern.

The Third or the Other’s other calls into question precisely the unlimited responsibility to and for the Other (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 227). The Third’s existence shatters the naïve relation between Self and Other. It also introduces the “problems of evaluating and calculating, of

priority and regulation, of comparing between incomparable alterities, and of the urgency of making a decision” (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 227). Hence, justice becomes necessary and it is with the Third that justice begins. The Third shatters proximity and congeals it into structure (Levinas, 1998, p. 82) and transports us into the realm of the Said (Simmons, 1999, p. 94). Due to the shattering of this proximity and the need to compare the incomparable (within the Said), Levinas defines justice as “the primary violence” (Levinas and Mortley, 1991, p. 18). The Third is also problematic in the sense that it is the Self’s other and the Other’s other, and this reasoning can be extended to include as many individuals as possible with the resulting situation being quite complex.^{xx} Regardless, Levinas maintains, that despite all of what the Third *introduces*, the original ethical edict of infinite responsibility remains even if it cannot be fulfilled (Simmons, 1999).

It is at this juncture that Zizek’s criticism needs to be further examined. Throughout *Otherwise Than Being*, and elsewhere, Levinas speaks of the Third as “entering” or “troubling,” the I-Other relation and “introducing” problems (Pinchevski, 2005a, uses the same language). Though Levinas, in an interview, admits that “[w]e are not a pair, alone in the world, but at least three...,”^{xxi} he goes on to posit this as “Two *plus* a third” (Robbins, 2001, p. 193, *my emphasis*); that is he reasserts “that everything begins as if we were only two” (Levinas et al., 1988, p. 170). Zizek takes aim at this claim and states “that the Third is not secondary: it is always-already here” (p. 182). His argument is worth quoting at length:

...the primordial ethical obligation is toward this Third who is *not* here in the face-to-face relationship, the one in shadow, like the absent child of a love-couple... This brings us to the radical anti-Levinasian conclusion: the true ethical step is the one *beyond* the face of the other, the one of *suspending* the hold of the face: the choice *against* the face, for the *third*. This coldness *is* justice at its most elementary. Every preempting to the Other in the guise of his or her face relegates the Third to the faceless background. The elementary gesture of justice is not to show respect for the face in front of me, to be open to its depth, but to abstract from it and refocus onto the faceless Thirds in the background.

It is only such a shift of focus onto the Third that effectively *uproots* justice, liberating it from the contingent umbilical link that renders it ‘embedded’ in a particular situation (Zizek, 2005, pp. 182-4. *Emphasis in original*).

There are several problems with Zizek’s critique that should be noted. First, Zizek states that the Third uproots justice from its link to a particular situation. For Levinas, justice is always uprooted from the I-Other relation, it is perhaps the defining characteristics of justice. A justice he himself states begins with the Third, even if he believes it to be violent and ‘unethical’ (Simmons, 1999). Second, Zizek calls for suspending the hold of, or “smashing,” the face of the Other. Again, Levinas does the same. Justice, the first violence, requires the “transformation of faces into objective and plastic forms, into figures which are visible but de-faced” (Robbins, 2001, p. 116). In effect, Levinas calls for reducing the face into what it inherently “overflows” – its plastic image (see: Levinas, 1969, p. 50-51). Regardless of these similarities that void part of Zizek’s critique, his criticism maintains its radically anti-Levinasian character by asserting that, counter to Levinas, the Third is “always-already here” and that the move for the Third, by smashing the face of the Other, is the *primordial ethical act*, while for Levinas, it is the first act of justice. Giving primacy to the Third is the only way, according to Zizek, to avoid the pitfalls of Levinas’ philosophy as illustrated by *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

Zizek’s critique is suggestive of an ethical imperative from which an ethics for news media can begin take solid form, an active imperative, but one that does not negate the passive imperative of “interrupt me.” To this I turn next. None of this is meant to suggest that Levinas’ philosophy is to be abandoned in its entirety. Below I suggest a way of navigating through Levinas’ philosophy, Pinchevski’s re-reading of it and Zizek’s criticism in order to formulate an ethics for news media.

Let Me Interrupt!

Zizek's criticism does not negate the imperative "Interrupt me". In fact, it simply shifts it from the Other to the Third.^{xxii} For us to go past or suspend the face of the Other, we must allow the Third to interrupt us. Levinas also believes that the Third does in fact interrupt (Levinas, 1998, p. 150). Zizek's critique also introduces the reversal of this passivity; one that can be stated as the ethical imperative "let me interrupt!" While I remain somewhat "hostage" (to use Levinas' term) I also become a hostage-taker. That is, I must act as an Other and, to do this, I must suspend or smash the face of the Other (or reduce it into a plastic form). Such a conception is not completely absent from Levinas' work, even if it is underdeveloped. He states that "I am another for others" (Levinas, 1998, p. 158) or that I "feel myself to be the other of the other" (Levinas, 1969, p. 84). There are also passages that belie the naïve, unlimited responsibility to the Other, at least as it is characterized by Zizek's parable above. Levinas (1969) at times refers to the Other as a "student" (p. 81) and states that even when the Other commands me as master, "this command commands me to command" (p. 213). Levinas, as stated above, goes as far to say that I am responsible for the Other's very responsibility; I must call on the Other to respond to others, to the Third. All this suggests, that I, as the Other, must also actively interrupt. To do this I must compare, I must enter into the world of the Said. Ultimately for Levinas, it is the Third (the one who brings us into the Said), in treating me as an other, that I am "someone to be concerned about, someone to answer for" (Lingis, 1998, p. xli). However, because, as I have outlined above, the Third is a secondary consideration for Levinas, and if it is only in the Third that I become an Other, then the active imperative of "let me interrupt!" is relegated to a secondary position. To place this on par with the passive imperative "interrupt me" the Third must be acknowledged as "always-already here."

Important aspects of Levinas' philosophy are maintained. The Self here still has no meaning in its "own being-in-the-world" and subjectivity remains heteronomous, though beyond the pair. Responsibility is also thus maintained, but not strictly to the (one) Other. Also, this double-role of interrupted and interrupter should not be confused with reciprocity. None of this suggests anything of the sort. In any truly complex series of interactions, such reciprocity is not guaranteed, just as it is not in Levinas' philosophy. This double-role is what allows for the "community of interruption" that Pinchevski (2005a) advocates (pp. 96-100). However, this double-role requires the primacy of the Other's right to exist over mine be challenged. As Zizek (2005) states, Levinas' questioning of the Self's right to exist is an "inverted arrogance, as if I am the center whose existence threatens all others:

...Recall the similar paradox that structures the politically correct landscape: people far from the Western world are allowed to fully assert their particular ethnic identity without being proclaimed essentialist racist identitarians (native Americans, blacks, etc.). The closer one gets to the notorious white heterosexual males, the more problematic this assertion is: Asians are still OK; Italians and Irish maybe; with Germans and Scandinavians, it is already problematic...such a prohibition...although it presents itself as the admission of their guilt, nonetheless confers on them a central position" (p. 156).

It is only by allowing for the imperative of "let me interrupt!" that we can, perhaps paradoxically, avoid a true centralization of the Self. While establishing my right to exist as equal to that of the Other (and the Third, the Fourth, etc.), the active imperative does not negate one's responsibility as it does not negate the passive imperative "interrupt me." As such, it does not do away with the (non)concept of the face; suspending the face does not negate it. In calling the Other to respond, in interrupting her, in suspending her face, we do so to allow the entry of another's face. Even as plastic, the face cannot be completely vanquished – just as the Said cannot fully silence the Saying – and its trace acts as a reminder that one must take care in interrupting. But how does one interrupt? How are we to smash the face of the Other for the Third, and even prior to

this, decide who is the Other and who is the Third when such decisions must be made, as Levinas stated, within the Said?

The Said(s): Toward an Ethics after Ethical Violence

Perhaps one of the largest flaws in Levinas' philosophy is that there is *a* Said. This creates a problem if we accept the imperative of "let me interrupt!" along with that of "interrupt me". If we have to put these into practice in the realm of the Said (which is where the Third brings us and where news media operate) and if only the Saying can puncture the Said, the question of how to bring about this puncturing within a realm that must at times reduce the face (that which speaks) into a plastic image is of primary importance. I contend that the Said must be pluralized. Levinas sees the state, medicine and philosophy as producers of the Said (Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 86) – to the Said purported by these institutions there are obvious challengers, or other Sais that are really-existing. I concede, nonetheless, that the conception of interruption that will follow here is perhaps on different level than that of Levinas' original; however, it is one Levinas' had supported (see: Levinas and Mortley, 1991). It is with the multiplication of the Said that interrupting as an active ethical imperative becomes possible. Levinas himself claims that the Said does not completely conquer Saying and that the latter survives in the former, though in an ever-unfaithful form. Hence the question becomes one of how to be as faithful to the Saying as possible. Richard Rorty (1989) states that to challenge something one must speak differently. While *a* Said cannot be faithful to an addressing face, the use of another Said, that is, a different way of speaking, while also unfaithful to any addressing face, can play the role of Saying insofar that it interrupts the original Said.^{xxiii} A Said here does not act as a face of the Third. It is only in the subsequent fissure or tension caused by this

interruption, this collision of Sais, which provides a space or moment where the face of the Third may make an entry.

Such a view fits with Levinas' views on the press:

...you know the prophets of the Bible, they come and say to the king that his method of dispensing justice is wrong. The prophet doesn't do this in a clandestine way: he comes before the king and he tells him. In the liberal state, it's the *press*, the poets, the writers who fulfill this role (Levinas and Mortley, 1991, p. 19, *my emphasis*).

Also, Hannan's (2008) review of Pinchevski's *By Way of Interruption* states that Pinchevski's book shows that "our ethical task ought to be to subject existing democratic institutions to ongoing systematic critique, identifying excluded voices and, when necessary, witnessing on their behalf" (p. 348). In other words, "the state must be constantly reminded of its inherent violence" (Simmons, 1999, p. 99). In these comments appears the imperative "let me interrupt!" I have already outlined above how this imperative is also not completely out of line with Levinas' philosophy. If "all one can do is live this effort to reduce the said to the saying" (Lingis, 1998, p. xxxvii) then to interrupt *a* Said with another Said and within the subsequent fissure perhaps allow for the face (of the up-to-then faceless Thirds in the shadows) to make an entry, is perhaps the ethical act *par excellence*, even if it is done at the expense of another face. It is this ethical act within the sphere of ethical violence is what allows for and supports a community of interruption; one which consists of not only being open to interruption but also of interrupting.

Towards An Ethics of News Media

Before I begin to outline the consequences of the active ethical imperative on news media practices it should be stated that the press cannot simply interrupt if we hope to achieve a community of interruption; they must be open to interruption themselves. When reporting on the Third, the press must allow their Said to be interrupted by the Said of those on whom they are

reporting. This is required if one wants to effectively interrupt and open a space for the face of the Third. Also, the press must also be open to scrutiny. The press, just as the state, is inherently violent^{xxiv} and should be reminded of this accordingly. This is so not only because the media must use representations. More importantly, the practice of interruption, of providing fissures in which the face of the Third can make an entry, is almost always done at the cost of another. Therefore, it must be an institution that allows for the expression of multiple Saids whether through letters to the editor, contributors or other forms of feedback. Here, the imperative “interrupt me,” remains key to the ethics of news media.

There is not space here to explore the bearing of this theory of an ethics of news media on the entire scope of news media practices, thus I will limit my discussion to only several features: sourcing and representation.^{xxv} If it is the ethical duty of the media to interrupt, then perhaps the most important practice in need of examination is that of sourcing, that is, how and from whom the news media retrieve information. Scholars have often pointed out that the news media is overly dependent on what they call “official sources” (see: Bagdikian, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Herman and Chomsky, 1986; Nichols and McChesney, 2005; Strentz, 1978). This, in conjunction with a belief that their duty is to simply be a conduit of information, that is to report objectively, creates an ethical problem. In such a scenario simply “reporting” turns the journalist into a conduit for the Said of the state. Such a practice leaves no room for interruption; there is no place for the journalist to create a fissure between Saids. Hence, the Third remains faceless and the state is not reminded of its inherent violence. Here, a journalist must be weary of his or her sources as their Said(s) always privilege some at the expense of others. This is especially the case with “official” sources, as they are becoming much more “PR” savvy.^{xxvi} I will return to this topic at the end of this section.

The journalist as conduit also, according to Robert McChesney (2004), leads to a lack of contextualization in American news media. Eschewing contextualization was seen as a way for journalists to subsequently avoid having to take a particular stance on a story, event or issue. The theory purported here does not simply call for an extension of context or historicizing, though in a world where one must “compare incomparables,” these are no doubt important. However, in recognizing ethical communication as interruption, the focus must be on counter-contextualization, that is, placing the event within *a* Said counter to the one given by institutions in dominant positions (such as the state). That is, a counter-contextualization that will interrupt the Said (of the state). Here, unlike what contextualization suggests, the focus is not on ensuring the successful transmission of a story, but rather of interrupting the narrative within it. This creates a fissure or space in which the Third can speak (even if it is at the cost of the Other’s face).

The news media is often a citizen’s only source concerning far-off “Others” or “Thirds,” and as stated above, any ethics of news media must be concerned with this. Here the issue of representation takes center stage. Judith Butler (2004) states that “there is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and the paradox must be retained in the representation we give” (p. 144). In other words, the image must acknowledge its failure to represent its referent. This raises the obvious practical question concerning the plausibility of such an image. Also, this conception of the ethical image brings to mind the familiar (and now banal) lines common in newspapers such as “Words cannot express/convey/represent....” Have not such statements become in a sense meaningless? Similarly, an image, even if one imagines such an image to be possible, that embodies these phrases would be just as banal. An image alone is not capable of such an expression.

This rejection of Butler's ethical image leads to the conclusion that ethics here cannot be preoccupied with formulating *ideal* representations. This is not to suggest that representation is not important, it is crucial. Depiction can be as dehumanizing as it can be humanizing (Butler, 2004), the existence of racist and sexist representations of peoples, making this clear. However, Levinas states that the "essence" of ethics is that it disrupts essence. Hence, the ethics here are concerned with practice in its most processual sense. When considering that material language cannot faithfully capture its referent(s) and that it makes the Other (or Third) Same, it is clear that depicting, or objectively reporting on, the Third is simply not enough.^{xxvii} Rather the journalist should be concerned with creating a space where the face of the Third can speak. The journalist must interrupt representations of Others and Thirds within the Said of dominant institutions as well as allow for the representations that they use, and cannot escape using, to be interrupted.

In the above section I used the terms "Other" and "Third" interchangeably. I have done this because the question remains of how the journalist is to navigate such a complex position. Who is the Other? Who is the Third? What is their relation? Why should I suspend the face of one for the other? This is a complex problem that there is not enough space to deal with here. However, I will begin to answer it by suggesting not a content of ethics but a positioning, one that adheres to what Levinas referred to as the "essence" of ethics (described above). This answer positions the journalist as one with a healthy sense of skepticism or even distrust.

The practice of interruption requires the journalist to be in a sense distrustful of her sources, those she is reporting on, those for whom she is opening up a space to speak (the Third) and even herself (so that she remains open to being interrupted as well). This is an uncomfortable position: the status of prophet comes with heavy responsibility. Such distrust

should be viewed as healthy and vital to supporting a community of interruption; a community in which the journalist states “I do not trust you all”.^{xxviii} This is not objectivism nor is it a statement of content – it is not a statement of whom one trusts and whom one does not trust. Rather it is a position of suspicion that requires the journalist to interrupt but also allows for him or her to be interrupted. In order to interrupt and to allow oneself to be interrupted, the journalist must eschew the moderate enlightenment view of individualism and embrace her more complex position in society. In order to interrupt the journalist must speak differently. Here, it is no longer possible to be purely objective, in its common usage (and as defined earlier), because to speak differently involves utilizing an alternative Said, the use of which, suggests clashing “values” (as does the existence of multiple Sais). Conversely, this acceptance of one’s inability to be above the fray, along with a healthy distrust of oneself, prevents the journalist from being a dogmatic advocate and opens her up to being interrupted. It is this positioning that sets the journalist in between and above the false dichotomy of advocate and reporter.^{xxix}

Conclusion

The world is inhabited by a multitude of others. Their relations with one another are not always clear and can range anywhere from amicable to hostile to indifferent. In such a situation, an ethical act towards one of these others is often done, at the expense of another. This does not negate Levinas insight concerning responsibility. The above does however call for it to be modified. Our responsibility is no longer unlimited toward one Other, as there is always a Third involved. More importantly, we must acknowledge the uncomfortable fact that it is not readily evident to whom it is we are responsible and that to make such a decision we must be active rather than simply passive. Privileging of the Third, rather than of the Other as Levinas does, more explicitly acknowledges these facts; to act ethically toward the Third, we have (actively)

stepped over the “Second,” the Other. Here we admit taking a step into what Levinas calls ethical violence. As Levinas himself admits, in a world inhabited by more than two, this step is inevitable and necessary. However, even in such a precarious environment Levinas concepts are useful: a trace of the Saying of the face remains even if it conveys the radical alterity of others in an ever unfaithful form and we must be open to its interruption even when doing so at the expense of another. The primary ethical concern remains allowing for, and creating, spaces in which the Third, who is *an* Other, can speak.

Many citizens depend on the news media for any connection to a multitude of faceless others within the international community. Hence, the role of journalists in achieving a community of interruption is crucial. The journalist is placed in the uncomfortable position of prophet, where distrust is, perhaps ironically, key to acting ethically. A distrust not only of the Other whom she steps over for the Third, but also of the Third as well as herself and her position within a complex social environment – while one must accept that they cannot be above the fray, this does not mean that one should accept her position as natural or as the “correct” position. In such a scenario the journalist must make judgments between, as Levinas puts it, “incomparables.” In the ethics explicated above, Dostoyevsky’s maxim, “Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others” remains true. However, in order to adhere to this, the journalist cannot only be passively open to the interruption of the Other, especially with the knowledge that this is at the expense of yet another. Here, the journalist must, even if admitting guilt above all others’, step into the fray, or more accurately accept that they are already in it, and state, “let me interrupt!”

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ⁱ In order not to do a disservice to the multitude of comparative work done on media systems, and for the sake of clarity, I will limit my discussion of the news media environment to that of “Western” journalism and, more particularly, the United States.

ⁱⁱ Here I refer to Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) conception of the “Liberal Model” and the ideals found therein such as a neutral-commercial press, objectivity and a “reporting –only ethos.” While the authors themselves admit that “literal neutrality” is impossible, they provide ample evidence that ideals of objectivity are strong in the countries that fall under this model – even if in varying degrees. As stated, my main source of examples is the United States which falls under this Liberal Model most faithfully. Indeed it is in the United States where “objectivity” is considered a “chief occupational value” (Schudson, 2008, p. 286).

ⁱⁱⁱ There is a vast literature on this concept and much disagreement over its definition, meaning and usefulness. Due to the fact that this paper borrows mainly from work on American journalism, the definition found in Michael Schudson’s (2008) article will be utilized: “Objectivity is at once a moral ideal, a set of reporting and editing practices, and an observable pattern in news writing...The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts... According to the objectivity norm, the journalist’s job consists of reporting something called ‘news’ without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way” (pp. 286-287).

^{iv} This is only part of what Pinchevski, borrowing from Derrida, refers to as the failure of communication. Pinchevski moves away from previous theories of communication that define the failure of communication as the failed transfer of information from person A to person B. Rather, he posits that the “failure of communication,” – the inherent failure of representation – and the subsequent impossibility of communication is what “gives birth” to the very possibility of communication. This is a complex argument that cannot be completely covered here. For an in depth discussion of the “failure of communication,” see: Pinchevski (2005a, pp. 183-88).

^v This is not to suggest that one should not be concerned with the flow of information, but rather that one should not reduce news media’s function to only this.

^{vi} The radical nature of the alterity Levinas refers should be noted: “The alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity” (Levinas, 1969, p. 194).

^{vii} “The term *essence* here expresses *being* different from *beings*, the German *Sein* distinguished from *Seiendes*” (Lingis, 1998, p. xlvii).

^{viii} Pinchevski (2005a) develops this further to state that this limit or impossibility of communication marks the very possibility of ethical communication (p. 188).

^{ix} The concept of the “face,” which is the bearer of the Other’s radical alterity, will be dealt with in detail below.

^x While it may seem at first glance that Levinas may dismiss this contextualization and analysis in lieu of his conception of “the face” and what knowledge does to it, my further analysis will show that his theory does not necessarily negate the importance of this in the media, though neither Levinas or Pinchevski state it explicitly.

^{xi} In Levinas & Nemo (1985) the passage is translated as “We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than the others” (p. 98). The quote is from Book VI, IIa of *The Borthers*. Indeed, this was a passage tied closely to Levinas philosophy: in Robbins (2001) collected volume, Levinas recites this quote in six of the 20 interviews therein.

^{xii} Proximity is only reduced into a spatial structure when the Third comes into the picture (Levinas, 1998, pp. 81-82). The concept of *le tiers*, or the Third, becomes central to my argument below.

^{xiii} To the question: “I can know someone to perfection, but this knowledge will never itself be a proximity?” Levinas answers “No” (Levinas & Nemo, 1985, p. 97).

^{xiv} Here again the possibility of a media ethics based on Levinas’ philosophy is put into question: if the ethical thing to do is to be responsible to and for the Other, how can journalistic-media do this when they rely on and see their job as providing information. This will be dealt with in detail below.

^{xv} “Where is my uniqueness? At the moment when I am responsible for the other I am unique” (Levinas & Poirié, 2001, p. 66).

^{xvi} Levinas makes the ethical nature of this responsibility clear: “The epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility of this temptation and attempt. If the resistance to murder were not ethical but real, we would have a *perception* of it, with all that reverts to the subjective in perception. We would remain within the idealism of a *consciousness* of struggle, and not in relation to the Other” (Levinas, 1969, p. 199). Connected to this is the fact that the face, through which this ethical edict is communicated, is not a force, but an authority (Levinas, Wright, Hughes & Ainley, 1988, p. 169; also cited in Pinchevski, 2005a, p. 76).

^{xvii} There is debate over whether such a radical passivity can be the basis for ethical action. See: Hofmeyr’s (2009) collected volume entitled *Radical Passivity*, particularly the pieces by Lingis and Zeillinger who argue opposite positions on this

issue.

^{xviii} Is the audience the other? If so which audience? How does one make the judgment of whom to be responsible to?

^{xix} See Robbins (2001), specifically Levinas & Poirié, 2001, p. 51 therein.

^{xx} Levinas (1998) himself acknowledges something parallel to this complexity: “What then are the other and the third party for one another? What have they done to one another? Which passes before the other? The other stands in relationship with the third party, for whom I cannot entirely answer, even if I alone answer, before any question, for my neighbor” (p. 157). This is precisely the question Dayan (2007) poses concerning Silverstone’s *Media and Morality* which utilizes Levinas, but makes no mention of the Third.

^{xxi} Again, precisely Dayan’s observation that was ignored by Silverstone (see above).

^{xxii} Zizek’s call for coldness in justice may belie this observation. It should be noted that Zizek is concerned with society as a whole, in which the State can attempt to take on this role of coldness through the judiciary. Levinas states that it is the state that steps in to ensure justice (Levinas, Ferry, Hadas-Lebel & Pasquier, 2001, p. 193). However, in the context of news media, there is no possibility of such a coldness, of a judiciary. This will become clearer in my discussion below.

^{xxiii} One can think of examples from the world of art or news media, where the artist or journalist wants her work to “speak” to people. They achieve this by employing a Said that offers sharp contrasts to, and interrupts, the narrative of the dominant Said, they wish to challenge.

^{xxiv} On the media and symbolic violence, see: Couldry, 2003.

^{xxv} Both are large topics and my treatment of either should not be considered exhaustive.

^{xxvi} Perhaps the most intriguing and disturbing example is the recent case of the Pentagon planting “expert” talking heads on the major network news broadcasts. Experts that not only supported the Pentagon’s race to war, but at times repeated the “party line” almost verbatim. See: Barstow, 2008.

^{xxvii} For example: often, as Zelizer (2004) shows, images that are used to depict Others (or Thirds) in times of war gravitate toward familiar depictions of the past. The images are framed within a Said familiar to the population the news media serves. This reduces the radical alterity of the Other to the Same and reduces the context of the Other to the Same. The Other (or Third) is made Same twice over in a sense.

^{xxviii} This is a play on Zizek’s explication of the logic of the universal and its constitutive exception. Zizek (2005) following Lacan states that it is the exception that makes the rule. This logic shows that a statement such as “I love you all” necessarily relies on “I really hate some of you”, “a thesis abundantly confirmed by the fact that universal love for humanity always led to the brutal hatred of the (actually existing) exception, of the enemies of humanity”; Erich Mielke, the boss of the East German secret police used the phrase “But I love you all” to defend himself” (p. 183). Conversely, Zizek states that that “‘I do not love you all’ is the only foundation of ‘there is nobody that I do not love’” (p. 183). Hence, hatred emerges out of universal love and love emerges out of universal indifference; it is this need for indifference that brings him to his radical (not so) anti-Levinasian conclusion mentioned above. However, if we adapt this triangle of love, hatred and indifference to news media, we end up with a triangle of trust, distrust and indifference; “I do not trust all of you” becomes the foundation of “there is nobody that I do not trust”. While an attractive philosophical approach, this “indifference” comes far too close to being “Objectivism”. While Zizek states that philosophy is indifferent to its object, journalists and news media are not; this limits the value of his approach for our purposes here.

^{xxix} In considering this, the journalist’s conception of the Good is important. This concept may also provide a bridge between virtue-based Neo-Aristotelian and Levinasian approaches to ethics. Though virtues purported by Neo-Aristotelians (such as those by Williams, 2002) would not easily fit the theory outlined above, it is not to say that there is not common ground. However, before this could be done an in depth comparison of the concept of the Good in both schools of thought is required. That is a large task; one for another time.