

TRAUMA IN EMMANUEL LEVINAS' WRITING BODY

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Collage from "An-Other Language? Psychosomatic Research and the Lévinasian Conception of Otherness in Trauma Therapy" with the research question: When Lévinas claims that „the relationship between the Same and the Other is language“ in *Totality and Infinity*, what is meant by the *Same*, what is meant by the *Other*, what is meant by *Relationship*? And how can the findings (psychosomatics of Lévinas' ethics) be connected/applied to enhance Trauma Therapy?¹

In this contribution, I will focus on the findings, meaning the psychosomatics of Lévinas' Ethics, and how they are connected to trauma (therapy). First, trauma will be defined. Then, aspects of Lévinas' theory elucidated. Then, trauma in Lévinas' theory identified. Afterwards, psychosomatics will be defined, and embodied cognition – and with that, a top-down approach to trauma treatment introduced that is about the engagement with text as a substantial 'encounter' than may be usually thought.

There are three foci in this article: trauma, Lévinas' writing, and embodiment. Over the course of the text at hand, the embodiment of trauma, also through written text, is explored. The argument is: First, Lévinas develops an ethics of alterity at the basis of his own traumas (the experiences and consequences of World War II). Second, reading Lévinas' theory is a kind of embodied encounter. This can contribute to an understanding of how to engage with and be around traumatised subjects. If philosophy around trauma and a lived ethics of alterity has immediate psychosomatic effects on the reader, then philosophy and its impact can potentially be understood in a new light as well, also when it comes to trauma work.

For now, let's keep in mind that for Lévinas, trauma is Otherness. – but also something beautiful if an Openness is given. An Openness to the Infinite, to the Unknown. This Openness is an ethical attitude that can be summarised with 'hineni'. It is a way of meeting each other in a completely impartial way (which often is difficult if one is dissociated as it is the mind solely that speaks to oneself. If however, we consider the mind-body-connection as well, then the body is

¹ What does reading Lévinas' account of the ethical relation in *Totality and Infinity* tell us about the needs of the traumatised? What is the therapeutic relevance and take-home for trauma workers from Lévinas' philosophy in *Totality and Infinity*?

brought into focus, too – and also the effects that a philosophical text may have that are not solely cognitive.

Trauma in Emmanuel Lévinas' Writing Body

Contrary to what may be commonly thought, the discipline of philosophy – in which this thesis is written in and what it aims to prove – can as philosophical practice be embedded in our common lifeworlds. Rather than building an ivory tower (which philosophy and other humanities is and are commonly blamed for), it can actually aid to map out the inner architecture of emotions and their consequences that define our lived human experience. It is not just rational thinking, but emotional labour. This is demonstrated by considering a specific human experience: the traumatic moment.

Here, “we are affected” and the question posed is “how we live out that affect.”² Not just how each of us lives it out in actuality, but we can ask philosophically how it may be lived out ideally – under ideal circumstances (what these circumstances may be) – Lévinas is an example of a philosopher that through writing lived out his affect and perhaps transformed it into a theory useful for trauma work. Considering this may enhance psychological care taking as part of a medical practice with trauma patients.³ Simply put: it may enhance the quality of trauma therapy offered. How? It can provide a work ethic. As said, this may aid in dealing with trauma patients, and thus (their) dealing with (their) traumatisation(s). Given that the therapist reads and engages with the project at hand. It can also offer another perspective on text where words have a socio-somatic effect and thus text is considered to have a potential for healing trauma. At first, it may seem contradictory because trauma work is mostly body-focused and of course text is not. However, with recent findings on embodied cognition, text is considered corporeal too.

The latter point will be in focus alongside Lévinas' ethics of Alterity that he begins to develop in *Totality and Infinity*.

Here is the structure:

- I. Trauma (etymology, definitions, consequences)
- II. Aspects of Lévinas' Ethics (Alterity/Otherness, the Ethical Relation as Language, *Hineni*)
- III. Identifying Trauma in Lévinas' Ethics at hand (dissociation in Otherness, the non-relation, focusing on the bodily encounter as well as being present with *hineni*)

² Anna Westin, *Embodied Trauma and Healing: Critical Conversations on the Concept of Health* (New York Routledge: 2022), 4.

³ An article on this and references to current research on this topic was written by Martin Dornberg: “Trauma und Verwundbarkeit bei E. Lévinas und in der Trauma Therapie,” in *Methode und Subjektivität, psycho-logik 3*, Freiburg-München: Karl Alber Verlag, 195-211.

IV. On the Psychosomatics of Lévinas' Ethics (Psychosomatics, Embodied Cognition)

Trauma (etymology, definitions, consequences)

At the core of my research lies trauma – derived from the Greek noun τραῦμα (trauma), translated from Latin to “wound”, “hurt”, “defeat”. Since 1894 there is also this sense of “psychic wound, unpleasant experience which causes abnormal stress.”⁴ Then there is from the 1650s onwards the adjective traumatic, from French *traumatique* and directly from Late Latin *traumaticus*, from Greek *traumatikos* “pertaining to a wound,” and the verb traumatise or traumatised since 1893 in a physical and since 1949 in a psychological sense. The psychological sense will be elucidated down below in order to understand the trauma of the holocaust, and the necessity of expressing it.⁵ Herein lies a hope to add something valuable to the reappraisal of past trauma, in particular the trauma of the holocaust.

This is in focus because I am part of the third generation in Austria that has to deal with unresolved trauma from the post-WWII period, and have an interest in understanding because I am, too, affected. This thesis is a way of acknowledging that, and aiming at adding to the discussion table on the how of resolving trauma. It is a rather recent discussion due to the *TTT* (“Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma”).⁶ Working with a Jewish thinker from that time – Lévinas is one of the survivors of this time as well as the holocaust – embedding the philosophy that comes from the immediate experience now in the current discussion and practice today is an attempt to locate myself and understand my generation’s situated-ness and the demands that may be tied to this. It is part of attempting to understand the human condition of being alive at this time; and facing that which is strange and Other in ourselves and in the world – so as to expand this understanding and also the possibility of empathising with others; which, in therapeutical work (but also any human encounter) is absolutely necessary.⁷ We are in particular concerned with psychosomatic work that aims at relating to oneself again as well as to others as “dissociation” is “the essence of trauma.”⁸

⁴ See for reference: Merriam Webster Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See i.e. medicamondiale.org.

⁷ Given that therapy is supposed to provide a positive relational experience, and with that the ideal way of relating to each other / the ideal relation – it is not just therapeutical work that empathy is absolutely necessary for, but, in fact, helpful (necessary) in any relation; meaning: when it comes to relating. We will define the tasks of therapy et. al. in section {VII}.

⁸ Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 66.

Depersonalisation⁹ is the core element of clinical categories which are considered to be trauma-related conditions, e.g. dissociative disorders, Borderline Personality Disorder, or Conversion Disorder.¹⁰ We will focus on dissociative categories as the research focus lies on the expressability and graspability of the trauma in order to allow for a relation again. So, one of the consequences of experiencing a traumatic event is (embodied) dissociation. It cuts one off from the world as a way of protecting the integrity of the person. It is one of the defence mechanisms of the brain, a rather complex one. This means that one is not in touch anymore with their feelings, bodily sensations and needs. With the loss of "psychological energy,"¹¹ the person cannot regulate their own behaviour any longer. Pierre Janet, the leading researcher on psychological trauma, says that an *émotion choc* ("emotional shock") occurs after trauma from which the consequences can spiral from.¹²

Because of the dissociative and alienated aspect of traumatisation, it is crucial to point out that the process of healing is not only an individual but a social endeavour as well. Thus, the problem brought up by the traumatic event cannot be solved by the individual solely, because the traumatised individual cannot stand alone. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.¹³ This is a psychological perspective of that which we look at philosophically; the importance of relationality in the face of the phenomenon of isolation from the traumatic experience.

Aspects of Lévinas' Ethics (Alterity/Otherness, the Ethical Relation as Language, Hineni)

In *Totality and Infinity*, trauma is mentioned as "trauma of astonishment."¹⁴ It is the trauma in which one is confronted with Otherness. This moment takes me by surprise; the moment where I stand wrapped in awe, when "the present is broken open (opened to the event, to the future) by that which it cannot grasp or anticipate."¹⁵

⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁰ For further clarification: "La psychologie humaniste et existentielle est un rameau bien à part dans le feuillage théorique des sciences humaines," says Alleaume B. in the *European Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*.

¹¹ G. Bühler Heim, "Psychological Trauma and Fixed Ideas in Pierre Janet's Conception of Dissociative Disorders," in *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 60 (2006): 111-129.112.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books 1992), 17.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh PA: Dusquesne University Press, 1969), 100.

¹⁵ Michael Newman, "Sensibility, Trauma, and the Trace: Levinas from Phenomenology to the Immemorial", in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 107.

Levinas differentiates between different types of trauma – whether he differentiates between the moments themselves as well or merely the consequences of that moment, is not entirely clear. It is clear however that there is a trauma which he calls that causes ‘useless suffering’ as opposed to the trauma through the Other. ‘Useless suffering’ refers to deliberate violence equivalent to the ‘totality of war’; By the ‘totality of war’ is also meant any power structure(s) that allow(s) for or actively make(s) “useless suffering happen; that cause continuous trauma due to force. It is this kind of violence that Levinas understands as causing pain that is left to live through after experiencing trauma; psychosomatically.¹⁶ This would be psychological trauma as we commonly understand it. There is, however, another kind of trauma, that actually is necessary in order to be in the world, to be in relation. It is the ‘trauma’-tic effect that another person can have on one person that the Otherness of the other person sparks. Here, we directly come explicitly to ‘Otherness’ in Lévinas’ writing. As stated previously, in the existential moment in which i.e. Kierkegaard turns to the edge of a cliff, Lévinas turns to the Other, the vis-à-vis. As a heads up: since he focuses on the encounter in the moment of most radical freedom, of course the terms trauma, relation, and otherness merge in his theory. After the traumatic moment (as it is commonly understood), relating is only possible – according to Lévinas – if we turn to the Other.¹⁷ “The Other introduces into me that which is not me.”¹⁸ In a nutshell: For Lévinas, Otherness is traumatic. There are different forms that this otherness takes on. They merge into each other and become synonymous in his writing (as we shall see). Part of our task is to disassemble. Otherness in the form of the traumatic, Otherness as the vis-a-vis, Otherness as language – and all of this being the constitutive element for relating to one another; infinitely.

Though his phenomenological work has many overlaps with Lacanian psychoanalysis¹⁹ hence Alterity and Otherness, his writing is about the common ground, the building blocks for relating *to* one another instead of estrangement *from* each other. It is a positive kind of freedom; freedom²⁰ towards something/-one else that he writes about. In the following chapter, concepts in order to provoke a different

¹⁶ This focus on the body is amongst others found in Behnke’s (2002) phenomenology and Bourdieu’s thought (2005), claiming that psychosomatic illnesses are due to socio-somatics of societal power structures.

¹⁷ Still, Levinas asked to focus on the relationship – the in-between individuals, the bond, that which holds together.

¹⁸ Cf. fn. 203.

¹⁹ See also Lacan on “trauma”.

²⁰ In the course of writing about freedom, he writes about a radical openness for that which is other, alien, strange, and secret to, from, and for me – within and without – that allows the other to touch/to surprise/to come inside. And with that is meant both the trauma as well as the vis-a-vis. For him, they go hand in hand. Through his conception of Otherness, trauma (and the therapeutic responsibility) can be rethought.

conceptualisation of trauma are introduced. All of these concepts circle around Otherness, and are intertwined or almost synonymous to each other.

The paradox in Levinas' thinking about relation and also the difference but thought-provoking aspect regarding trauma therapy is that for him, it encompasses both the traumatic moment and the healing quality. Because there is a traumatisation, there must be a relation. It is the immediate encounter that traumatises and leaves the trace of responsibility; Levinas claims that the Other addresses me from beyond history.²¹ Behind the face is a "pre-original, anarchic" identity, "older than every beginning." This is a bodily encounter, potentially that which can be read to be the encounter with our reptilian brain. Information goes from there to the limbic system and only then gets digested in the prefrontal cortex that is concerned with rationalising an experience hence also verbalising it ('talk'). The therapeutical method based on Lévinas thought will be developed based on his conceptualisation of the ethical relation. The ethical relation is fundamental.²² For this reason, it is elucidated here, now

The Ethical Relation as Language

There is that which he calls 'language'. He writes: "Language does not belong among the relations that could appear through the structures of formal logic."²³ That is because "it is contact across a distance, relation with the non-touchable, across a void."²⁴ It is about „a language of trauma in order to evoke the way in which sensibility is always already affected by the Other."²⁵ How come that we are always already affected by another? – well, there are different meanings of language in the theory at hand from what we have so far understood: there is Body Language (which will be looked at more closely in the next section), then, there is what Lévinas calls 'Expression' as well as Speech, going off 'body language' drawing a connection to the necessity of trauma and touch, too. "The ethical relation, the face-to-face, also cuts across every relation one could call mystical [...] Here resides the rational character of the ethical relation and of language. No fear, no trembling could alter the straight-forwardness of this relationship, which preserves the discontinuity of relationship [...]" (TI 202f.) "The ethical relation cuts across every relation one could call mystical" The face to face must be honest.²⁶ That is a given. But it, in the face of trauma or after traumatisation, it is impossible not to be. This is what Levinas

²¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., 23.

²² *Ibid.*, 98.

²³ *Ibid.* 172f.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Newman, op. cit., 92.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 291.

writes: "Die ethische Beziehung, das *Von-Angesicht-zu-Angesicht*, hebt sich ab von jeder Beziehung, die man mystisch nennen könnte."²⁷ ('It cuts across every relation one could call mystical') It is rare and real. We will find an issue with this in 'Transcendence and Relation'.

"Here resides the rational character of the ethical relation and of language." Here, we find the understanding of 'language' that invites the rational component in. It is a particularly (because of the rational component?) straightforward way of relating: a way of bridging, perhaps? The rational character of the ethical relation and of language resides in the face-to-face, in the seeing hence recognising and then addressing the face. This means acknowledgement through spoken and verbal word? The direct confrontation of expression? The conscious aspect. "No fear, no trembling could alter the straightforwardness of this relationship which preserves the discontinuity of relationship.. And it is that straightforwardness that preserves the discontinuity of the relationship. Here, we can find an indication to Lévinas' traumatised body: him writing about 'fear' and 'trembling' as bodily (stress) reactions to the encounter, to the face-to-face. Why does he write about the discontinuity of relation here? — he writes about discontinuity because he differentiates between the two ways that two people can encounter each other: 'saying' something and having already 'said' something (else). There are two different ways of 'saying' addressed here; one where the body speaks, another the mind.

Herein lies the difference between the initial relation and the ethical relation: the initial relation so happens to both parties — it is instinctual and emotional (but in fact seems to go beyond the emotional component) connection, an unsayable in-between where that which is used by Lévinas to describe what happens has another meaning as that which it usually does. Language and speech are words to describe a calling of the other to the same. It is a way to describe a physiological resonance. This resonance is interrupted in the moment that the connection becomes conscious; at least it is that which the quotes indicate. Once the rational (reflective) element is also there, the 'relation' as Lévinas calls this, is interrupted. It is in 'discontinuity'. Why? Because it is brought to consciousness that there are other aspects to a living being that must be considered. From this moment onwards, anything that happens must be justifiable. And this justification is morality, is ethics. From the moment that one person realises the demand that the Other is addressing the Same with, they must *respond*. How do they respond?

Hineni is a term from the Jewish tradition; a concept used to describe the ethical encounter. It is translated from Hebrew as "Here I am"; fully present, letting go of my own needs, fully and completely open to the Other and to the present moment; meaning the Other in the present moment. What the

²⁷ Ibid.

attitude of *hineni* opens up: the borders between oneself and the other are moved because due to *hineni*, I allow myself to be emotionally touched by the other and try to empathise as fully as possible; physically, somatically, emotionally. It is "the sensible."²⁸

Levinas himself writes that the concept of *hineni* is grounded in a sense of responsibility that has a pre-cognitive character; he argues that "responsibility...has no cognitive character." For him, "Responsibility is not an esoteric knowledge or capacity but an embodied memory of the other."²⁹ This embodied memory is similar to the co-regulation-scheme that somatic experiencing with Peter Levine works with, too. It is the nervous systems' co-regulating each other automatically when two people are together.³⁰ It is a kind of embodied empathy that Levinas takes one step further, saying that it is an embodied responsibility. (It is interesting however why he says that it is responsibility. This deviates from Levine's account of course. Levine does not claim that it is the other person per se that traumatises.) It requires us to have "a psyche oriented toward the Other, the very configuration or shape of their selves being lived out as *hineni*, a perpetual Here I am (*me voici*)."³¹ And it is that which evokes a responsibility in the Same through the Other and for the Other. This responsibility comes from sensing a demand, a vulnerability, a need. This is where we recognize each other beyond difference as the focus lies on the bodily presence.

Identifying Trauma in Lévinas' Ethics at hand (dissociation in Otherness, the non-relation, focusing on the bodily encounter as well as being present with hineni)

After having gone through three topics in *Totality and Infinity*, we can identify trauma in both the topics of choice. Not only that, but also in the content. Firstly, his focus on Alterity and Otherness. This is an indicator for a traumatic experience because, as was mentioned in (I.), it is the most alienating experience that humans can have. Their reality shatters, and they are overwhelmed and alienated from themselves (their bodies) and others, too (see reference above on Bessel van der Kolk). Often this is due to dissociation – one of the consequences of a traumatic experience (as mentioned above). Lévinas' focus and also the foundation for his ethics may be due to his own dissociation. Another indicator for this may also be him speaking of relationship and also the 'discontinuity' or 'non-relationship' (see above) – which refers to the inability to relate after trauma.

²⁸ Newman, op. cit., 99.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Introduction to Somatic Experiencing via segreece.org.

³¹ D.M. Goodman and S. F. Grover, "Hineni and Transference: The Remembering and Forgetting of the Other," in *Pastoral Psychology*, 56(2008): 562.

Further, the claim on the 'pre-original' encounter meaning bodily presence with one another as well as presence itself is *d'accord* with the methods of *somatic experiencing* trauma therapy – and isn't it interesting that it is this attitude that Lévinas asks for is what is practiced trauma therapeutically?

On the Psychosomatics of Lévinas' Ethics (Psychosomatics, Embodied Cognition)

As indicated in the previous section, Lévinas' ethics shares a conceptualisation and method with a leading trauma therapeutical method. This also reflects his own trauma. Here we are of course particularly concerned with psychological trauma rather than physical one, and working with the fact that the psychological traumatising affects the rest of the system as well. It is an attempt to bring philosophy into the therapeutical field, and specifically since we are dealing with trauma as the ultimate other, it would be trauma-therapy. Since it is such an encompassing phenomenon and thus must be treated in this vastness, philosophy might be able to help. Hereby let psychosomatic medicine be defined, as "relating to a physical problem caused by emotional anxiety and not by illness, infection or injury."³² To be more precise:

1. "relating to, concerned with, or involving both mind and bod
2. "relating to, involving, or concerned with bodily symptoms caused by mental or emotional disturbances".

And since "psychosomatic medicine requires a philosophy that surmounts mind-body-dualism," it is that which I hope to provide with the following paragraphs in considering trauma, then (trauma) therapy, and methods based on Levinas' philosophy for psychosomatic trauma (that is, any trauma). Such demand, vulnerability, need can be sensed when reading Lévinas' text, namely "the language of the inaudible, the language of the unheard of (...) Scripture!"³³

The Socio-Somatic Effect: Embodied Cognition

According to Lévinas, it is language that constitutes relation, and perhaps we are somehow in relation by reading him. He is verbalising something that cannot be put in words – which is the reason why it is so abstract. He is processing his trauma which is why Otherness is the central focus (as we have seen earlier, trauma can be considered the ultimate Otherness).

³² Miriam Webster definition.

³³ Emmanuel Lévinas, E., "Useless Suffering" in *Entre Nous*, trans. R. Cohen (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), 178.

It is psychosomatic because Otherness is written into his writing. This may be due to *le autre* being an „inner representation of the invisible and inaudible physical reality“³⁴ that he was living with which found its way into writing.

D'Accord with the concreteness that philosophy can have as we can witness in Lévinas' writing, „our physiology provides the concepts for our philosophy,“ Lakoff wrote in his introduction to Benjamin Bergen's book *Louder than words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (2012). Marianna Bolognesi, a linguist at the International Center for Intercultural Exchange in Siena, Italy, puts it this way:

The classical view of cognition is that language is an independent system made with abstract symbols that work independently from our bodies. This view has been challenged by the embodied account of cognition which states that language is tightly connected to our experience. Our bodily experience.³⁵

So, we must look closely at the body (of thought) in this investigation; also, in the literature research -- as “the abstractions and generalisations of phenomenology cannot yield the fine-grained texture of lived experience”³⁶ but we ought to develop a sensibility for the fine-grained nuances of lived experience and the expression of exactly this experience by understanding the literal/physical/somatic potential that abstract and general phenomenological language holds. We can do this by investigating the written thoughts of holocaust survivors (post-holocaust philosophy) – that may be seemingly abstract, however a concrete reflection of the somatic state(s) if we rely on the recent findings of embodied cognition.

Now, of course there is a difference in reading Levinas and considering the relation between therapist and client or subject and traumatised subject. One of these differences is of course that, although Levinas somatic state may be sensible by reading him, we cannot be present with his whole person, only with a medium. Or is that the only way with which the traumatised can be present anyway? Never fully, but through a medium? There are aspects that I would like to address, both regarding Levinas' account of trauma in relation. This refers to the “face-to-face” (*Antlitz*) encounter and its effects (which unfortunately cannot be elaborated on here) We are thinking about Levinas as the trauma patient and the parallels between studying his philosophical work and being with a traumatised person, or phrase it differently: being with a

³⁴ van der Kolk, op. cit., 280.

³⁵ Michael Chorost, "Your brain on metaphors", *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 61(2014): B6-B9.

³⁶ Westin, op. cit., 464.

traumatised person by reading their words as opposed to but also physically working with them.³⁷

Levinas' conception of Otherness helps us understand. Lévinas claims that „the relationship between the Same and the Other is language“ in *Totality and Infinity*, what is meant by the Same, what is meant by the Other, what is meant by relationship?, and how can the findings (psychosomatics of Lévinas' ethics) be connected/applied to enhance Trauma Therapy?³⁸ So far we know that the Same is before the trauma, and the Other is (after) the trauma. The trauma of astonishment is necessary when we are in the world – it is physical, emotional, and psychological touch. It is language that is both physical and verbal.

Summary

When Lévinas claims that „the relationship between the Same and the Other is language“ in *Totality and Infinity*, what is meant by the *Same*, what is meant by the *Other*, what is meant by *relationship*? And how can the findings (psychosomatics of Lévinas' ethics) be connected/applied to enhance Trauma Therapy?³⁹ WE have considered over the course of this thesis: The Levinasian conception of otherness by looking at the quote: “The relationship between the same and the other is language” with the question posed right at the beginning of the investigation whether or not relationship is possible in Levinas thinking considering that he was writing out of a traumatisation (which makes one unable to relate) – because we are tied to our bodily symptoms that must be lived out, otherwise our thought and entire lives will revolve around that trauma (which arguably is what happened to Lévinas and his writing when it comes to these topics). It turns out that language is both bodily language and somatic expression as well as verbal language as expressed through writing. We have not explored speaking per se, but have gone straight to looking at ‘the face’ which is that which speaks by simply being present, by me simply noticing it. It seems that the bodily/physical/somatic aspect are closely connected to the cognitive and verbal aspect in Levinas' philosophy. This is especially the case when we consider embodied cognition as well as the ways that we can be touched without being touched physically. It is perhaps this dimension that he tries to break and keep open when he considers language and relation (for, where is the difference, really?) in *Totality and Infinity*. It

³⁷ van der Kolk, op. cit. 284; writing helps as we are listening to ourselves while we do.

³⁸ What does reading Lévinas' account of the ethical relation in *Totality and Infinity* tell about the needs of the traumatised? What is the therapeutic relevance and take-home for trauma workers from Lévinas' philosophy in *Totality and Infinity*?

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is the physical boundaries that are broken apart through that which is not physical for us, ungraspable to us: emotion. It is that which must simply be lived out and experienced – with others.

Levinas roots his philosophy in a lived ethics and a theory of alterity; of the connection between body and mind, between inner and outer, between me and them. None of the poles meet unless *a common language is established* – that we are only receptive towards if we open up to each other (which is something we can never prepare for). He extensively looks at this in *Totality and Infinity*, his habilitation from 1961 – translated into English by Lingis in 1969. It is one of the first works that he writes in which trauma is so overly present.

Concluding Thoughts

The new approach to trauma that we gain through Lévinas is that if we understand that trauma is ever-present, we open up to each other; we are in touch with our wounded selves to be more fully grounded in the present. Each one of us. Levinas' approach is one that touches on the “movement of the soul”; focusing on the relational spaces that we together can create if we meet each other with the ethico-spiritual attitude that he calls “hineni” in which we each become the embodiment of God, of an infinite being. Hineni is a lived and felt memory of the Other. It is an embodied memory of the responsibility that I have towards the other. It cannot be rationally explained, but only sensed.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes that “justice is the right to speak.”⁴⁰ It is the face that speaks before anything else can; and it is seeing the face that implies speaking. This kind of ‘speech’ is an instinctual one, one that requires what Levinas has called ‘the sensible’, needed when we work with trauma. Psychological trauma automatically is stored in the body as it is connected to emotion and automatically finds its way into writing. Psychological trauma is emotional trauma and thus it is embodied. It must be lived out psychosomatically, with an “affective witness,” in the sense-perceptual dimension, in order to discharge and co-regulate⁴¹ – which, to a certain extent, is possible when just reading a text if we take embodied cognition seriously. This is what we have explored about *hineni*, which adds a top-down-dimension to the other trauma-therapeutical methods that we have discussed. „it is this attention to the suffering of the other that, through the cruelties of our century (despite these cruelties, because of these cruelties) can be affirmed as the very nexus of human subjectivity to the point of being raised to the level of a supreme ethical principle,”⁴² as we can read in *Entre*

⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., 298.

⁴¹ van der Kolk, op. cit., 278 about „feeling listened to“ and the change in our physiology due to the activation of the limbic brain.

⁴² Op. cit., 84.

Nous/Useless Suffering. This ethical principle comes from and is a possibility of healing trauma – if therapists, acquaintances, friends,.. take seriously what Lévinas writes about: *HINENI*: “*Here I am*”. Fully and completely open to the present moment, meaning: the Other in the present moment. If we encounter text with this same attitude, it can have therapeutical effects as well, because a relation is entered from writer to reader and vice versa as well as the mind being in touch with the body and vice versa. Embodying philosophy happens by text itself as well as beyond that – if only we allow ourselves and each other to *be present*. So, there is not only the bodily encounter and presence with openness in his theory content-wise, but also a bodily encounter and presence with openness when reading Lévinas’ embodiment.