In Levinas’s sense, the relation between the self and the Other is incommensurate, asymmetrical, and thus cannot be thematized in consciousness (LR 89). Because the relation is unable to be exposed in a theme, it is unable to appear; its invisibility makes the subject “affected without the source of the affection becoming a theme of representation” (LR 90). Therefore, the relation with the other is prior to any of the subject’s acts, irreducible to its consciousness, unassembleable in the present, and therefore “already in the past” (ibid.). With the result that the consciousness is incapable of thematizing the relation with the Other, i.e., unable to bring the Other to the present, the contact with the Other has occurred in the immemorial past that has already passed by. The self is delayed behind the very present moment when the ethical relation took place. Levinas calls this relationship an obsession which is “inscribed in [the self’s] consciousness as something foreign, a disequilibrium, a delirium” (LR 91) so that the self cannot recuperate it. In this way the affection of the Other in the immemorial time breaks open the immanence of the present. To use Michael Newman’s terms, that “something has slipped in” (without the possibility of denial or of recognition) characterizes the relation with the Other as a trauma (112). For Levinas, the immemorial and traumatic relation with the Other is revealed in the corporeal sensibility as we shall see later.

The traumatic relation with the Other develops as follows: first, the self simultaneously undergoes not only the absolute otherness but also the indispensable relatedness to the Other. That is, the self cannot choose, anticipate or control this relation. It is traumatized by the Other who is, as Jeffery Bloechl remarks, “closer to me than I am to my self, leaves me no room to pause and consider, no room to observe and interpret what approaches” (146). To put it in another way, there is an interruption of the Other that has already befallen and contacted the self before the self’s tendency to associate with the past self in order to fabricate the
present I and before the self’s bent for the self-projecting future by confirming the present I. The contiguity with the Other presupposes the self’s auto-identification (due to the Other, the self is able to separate from the state of Being), and thus makes the self first contact the Other rather than identify with itself.

Second, with the first premise, the self bears the Other who is not fused together by the act of auto-identification. In Levinas’s sensible description, the Other has caused an “itch” “in one’s skin” (LR 98). That is, as Newman also points out, the self and the Other are “twisted over” uneasily in the self’s skin. As a result, no longer being regarded as a self-possessive entity, the self is exposed to the Other who is already within the self (Peperzak 223). The integral whole of the self has been broken. The itching skin is a site where the self and the Other are interweaved, and which the self transpires from and the Other inspires. To speak otherwise, the Other turns the self inside out, which to some extent implies that the Other is also outside of the self. To this point, Levinas remarks that the recurrence of the self, i.e., the return to the self as the auto-identification, is not proper to consciousness but is rather a “withdrawal-in-oneself which is an exile in oneself, without a foundation in anything else […]” (LR 96). The self-identity is thus recreated in Levinas’s sense—it is not “on the basis of the trajectory traced by this movement of consciousness, but a point already identified from the outside” (ibid., my emphasis). The self does not identify with the “already realized,” the “fact,” or the “already done,” which “contributes to consciousness or knowing” to stabilize the present I (LR 96-97). It is the Other who makes possible the self’s identity and tests to the limit of the self-autonomy by disturbing the immanence of the self-embracing being.

Third, since the self is exilic in itself, Levinas brings us to see the nature of the self as “no grounds” so that the self is not allowed to withdraw into “the hither side of rest in itself” (LR 98). On the hither side, there is a fracture in the immanence of being—the Other comes to the self as “the more-in-me [the self]-than-I [the self]-can-contain” (Newman 121). Therefore Levinas states that it is a “chimerical effort” for the self to “set itself up as a force
freed from the world and endowed with spiritual powers which may triumph or fail” (LR 121). That is, the so-called subjective freedom or the sublime soul is already “endowed with political and religious sovereignty or political principality” which presupposes the “absolute” freedom. Thus the self has been culturally or socially determined as an anonymous being, impossible to claim on the so-called autonomous freedom.

Levinas continues to argue that the self on the hither side “does not belong to Being or history” because it “is neither an effect at rest nor a cause in movement” (ibid.). What Levinas stresses is that the “Other-in-me [the self]” (OB 19) is closer to me than any knowledge, principle, or rule that belongs to the impersonal order. Thus the self’s recurrence is not only a response to itself but first of all a response to the Other. That is, the self, whose recurrence is a response to itself, is inverted to take the responsibility for the Other who interrupts the self from within. As a result, the self’s return to itself is not only a self-identifying route but also an openness to the Other. The self never unperturbedly rests in its self-identification. The itinerary to the Other does not totally go outside of the world, but is a departure which longs for exceeding the world’s rules from its inside.

For Levinas, the relation to the Other must occur in the physical reality rather than in the abstract idealism. In other words, the traumatic relation between the self and the Other is the infinity overflowing and exceeding the finitude in the reality. Emphasizing the aspect of the reality, Levinas makes a concrete correspondence between the relation of the self to the Other and the relation of the self to the other, especially the neighbor nearby. For the immanence of being as the self for itself is disturbed by the Other, in the reality the self is “supported in the other” (LR 121)—being is no longer a self-embracing reflectivity. The relation with the neighbor (the other), which is based on the relation with the Other, is unmediated. That is, the relation with the other is that with a singularity that cannot be mediated with any principle or any presupposed ideality. In this way Levinas orients his ethical relation to the “sensible possibility as immediate response” rather than an abstract idea (Newman 115-16).
Levinas thus draws on the body for the account of the self’s “strange sort of nature” (LR 98)—it is strange because herein the body is not only an “image” which embodies and represents the spirit (soul). He says: “The recurrence [of the self] is incarnation. In it [incarnation] the body which makes giving possible makes one other without alienating” (LR 99). The body is not an “obstacle” or a “tomb” that sets opposition to the soul and imprisons it (LR 121). On the contrary, the body is the “distinctive in-oneself,” the being, in which the self is exposed to the other, disposed by the exterior, and susceptible to being wounded and afflicted. That is, the ethical relation is based on the body’s affectivity and passivity.

Levinas goes further to enhance the biological schema to a higher structure. He argues that the body contacted by the other is the incarnation in the radical passivity. For there is impossibility of evading the contact of the other, the encounter with the other has the self bound to make a response. Moreover, the ineluctable contact leads to the non-distance between the self and the other. The non-distance indicates that the self is incapable of making a distance between itself and the other, and therefore it is the other, not nothingness that sets limit of one’s being (Alphonso Lingis 227).

The non-distance refers to the immediate contingency with the other. The other in his alterity reveals in his facing me with his gaze by which he “takes a stand,” “appeals to us and contests us” (Lingis 227). Since the self cannot detach from the contact with the other, their encounter sets limits on the space for the self. To have a space infers a position on the earth as well. It is the other, disarmed with his primary nudity of his eyes, who faces the self and calls the self to “stand forth” and to respond. By recognizing the other’s existence and his appealing demanding on it, the self is made to search for the meaning of its existence (ibid.). In Levinas’s sense, the self is thus able to emancipate itself from the solitary condition by relating to the other who extends the self’s life to take on meaning.

From the discussion above, we see that the other is within the self, yet out of it; the other exceeds the self, yet connects it. Moreover, the otherness does not restrict but extends the
self’s being. Due to the existence of the other, the self is able to acquire a position to articulate its subjectivity. It is at this point that Levinas explicates the condition of embodiment to the core. The body is rendered as the site where the encounter of the self and the other is concretely present. In the body the subjectivity, upon which the self’s freedom and responsibility hinge, is demystified as a hostage of the other. In the passivity the glamour of the spirit (soul; the self’s essence), which is impassive to the traumatic tangency with the other, is shadowed by the inspiration from the other (OB 69-70).

For Levinas, the self is “incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give” (OB 105). In Totality and Infinity (1979), the embodiment is the possibility for the self to participate in the world in order to fulfill its satisfaction. Thus the self is egocentric as its will for itself exerts potently. However, the corporeality also signals the possibility of corruption and degeneration. Life is thus made up of “endless tension” between the love of narcissistic egoism and the desire for death (Jeffery Bloechl 148).

Levinas further elaborates the notion of tension in Otherwise Than Being (2000). He accounts for the tension on the ground that the corporeality makes the meaning of giving possible. Giving, in Levinas’s sense, is an offer of one’s bread and one’s skin rather than a purely spiritual donation (OB 72). The idea to present “in flesh and bone” is thus an incarnation that illustrates and witnesses the possibility of the individual singularization, which is materialized in the vulnerability of the other, in need of the completion by a move to the other, and in the responsibility for the other who is already in the self. Therefore when Levinas says that the self’s identity “is brought out by responsibility and is at the service of the other” (OB 69), he links the responsibility to “a malady of identity,” in which the self is exposed, accused, and even persecuted. Hence, the incarnated self is “the same for the other” as well as “the same by the other” (ibid.). The body is itself irreducibility. In this way the body lays out the sensibility in the “non-assemblable duality” (ibid.), which the body and the soul are not assembled. Sensibility is “the duality of the sensing and the sensed” that
separates from each other and “at once a union” (OB 71-72).

The asymmetrical relation between the self and the other is shown in the body that the self’s will “contains the duality of betrayal and fidelity in its mortality” (TI 232). Levinas says that the body’s self-enjoyment is a movement of egoism in complacence and in selfishness (i.e., the will for itself), which is at odds with the orientation of the self-for-the-other (i.e., the will for the other). For Levinas, the separation of the self from the other is to some extent a concession to presuppose the self-interestedness as the condition for the self-for-the-other because “[w]ithout egoism” “suffering would not have any sense” (OB 73). Inasmuch as the meaning of giving refers to an absolute forfeit of the self-assertion, it presupposes the selfish enjoyment through which the giving would be a giving of oneself. For the giving of the self is for as well as by the other, the self is in the radical passivity whose corporal is animated or inspired by the other. In other words, the self is not allowed to actively or even passively fathom the meaning of the other because he doesn’t have “a knowing of being” or an access to the essence of being in the encounter with the other (OB 69). The self is dethroned to the extent of losing itself, and for its corporeality it becomes the hostage of the other.

Pointing out the spurious idealism of the self’s spirit (soul), Levinas speaks of the human corporeality on the ground that it is inspired or animated by the relation with the other, i.e., the relation of responsibility (Peperzak 223). The essence of the subject, for Levinas, is the inspiration of the other given to the self. Again, this idea echoes with the traumatic relation that the other has already contacted the self in the immemorial time. In the case of the “inspired giving” (ibid.), the other in the self gives the latter a finite freedom. That is, the self within whom the other exists does not absolutely abstain from the freedom (to acquire its self-satisfaction) but is animated to “give” in the corporeal way. Levinas calls this the subjectivity in the passivity in which the other is “in the same [the self] without alienating the same” (OB 112). In consequence, the freedom is not willful or imperial but is subjective to
the other’s existence.

Insofar as the other is in asymmetry with the self, he is beyond the self’s comprehension. In this way Levinas says that the self’s time does not exist in synchrony with the other’s time. In the process of aging, the body is getting old and dying by losing something that is an absolute loss without the possibility of regaining. Thus the self’s time lies in an irretrievable time that the other has passed by beyond the availability of remembrance (OB 51-52). To speak otherwise, the mortality has time that is based on the postponement of death. This is the meaning of giving that the self’s body in the service of the other undergoes various ways of deprivation, no matter in pain or in decline. In the corporeality the self is transferred to be the self-for-the-other that signifies a meaningful life. Therefore, Levinas stresses the significance of the body from the perspective of the other, and thus the duration of the self’s mortal life, i.e., the self’s time, becomes neither absurd nor illusory (TI 232) for it is involved in the relation to the other.

As a result, the self in its service for the other is not a “slavish alienation” (OB 105), which distinguishes the self from the other. On the reverse, the self is recreated in Levinas’s thought. He says: “The self is a sub-jectum; it is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything” without apprehending it (OB 116). In this way the self is not allowed latitude to resign from the responsibility because the distance between the subject and the object is abolished. This also implies that the subjectivity in incarnation is “an identity individuates itself of unique, without recourse to any system of references” (OB 110-12). The self in incarnation is caught up by the “deafening trauma” which goes against any intentionality and calls into question the self-affirmation. In other words, in incarnation the self is in radical passivity. The self in passivity is being persecuted and accused by the other. Under the “traumatic effect of persecution,” the self is forced to divest and exposes itself to the other in its response to and responsibility for the latter. Therefore the more the self exposes, the more it finds its being questioned in the immanent being; the more the self is questioned, the more
it discovers itself to be responsible; the more it feels responsible for the other, the more it becomes guilty for the responsibility grows beyond the measure of its ability.

As a consequence, in the return of the auto-identification, the self does not constitute an imperialistic domain, but sets forth an itinerary as a contestation against its narcissistic being and lays open the way to the otherness in the non-chosen assignment by the other. The self is obsessed with the responsibility for the other so that it submits to the appeal of the other. The self is exposed to the face of the other whose eyes are naked and undefended. What Levinas has been argued is that the face of the other awakens the self’s impassive or apathetic self-composedness and thus activates the self to take the responsibility. For the self, this is not an awakening to be active or aggressive; on the contrary, it is an awakening for the self to be the patience of the accusation, the persecution, and in such passivity there is the possibility of expiation. Levinas says: “Without persecution the ego raises its head and covers over the self” (OB 112). The self, who is in shame and in fear of egoism, is restless and unstable. To speak more precise, the guilty self is “overcome with shame and fear” (OB 195 n.15), and anxious for the ever longer-lived responsibility that demands on itself. In my view, the self, who is obsessed with the obligation to the other, is imbued with a great compassion inspired by the face of the other. This kind of compassion is not the moral empathy, which identifies with the other’s miserable-ness, for in the empathy the affection remains an auto-affection that is too tough to be altered by the other (OB 111). According to Levinas’s theoretical line, the compassion arises from the self’s relation to the other in the infinite responsibility—a relation with the goodness. Because the other is beyond being, to be in relation to the goodness is to go beyond being. Therefore the appealing of the other, in its radical form, “tests the limits of life itself” (149). The desire for the other who is beyond being is perhaps the desire for death. Since the compassion is up-borne in the self’s being responsible for the other to the extent that the self-intactness or self-interestedness is moved to open onto the revelation of the goodness, it keeps the self’s life at bay for the self might uncontrollably go
where the desire for the other leads.

If the self’s body is narcissistic by nature for its own enjoyment, Levinas’s ethical relation based on the possibility of physical degeneration makes possible the reverse of the self-for-itself to be the self-for-the-other. This kind of transfiguration occurs in the physical reality in which the self’s being is determined by senses. As is mentioned, the sensibility is of two kinds in Levinas’s thought: the sensibility that is based on the self’s appropriation of the other things through the body; and the sensibility that the body is expropriated and is thus a hostage of the other (Lingis 227). In Levinas’s thought, the being should contain the narcissistic love for life and the desire for death. For the two forces are incommensurable, life presupposes the contention between these two forces to the extent that any balance trying to tranquilize life may break down at any moment so that the definite identity is never achieved (Bloechl 148).

In consequence, Levinas’s ethical relation is grounded on a material account of the reality. From his perspective, ethics is an endless searching for justice that the desire for the other always interrogates the self’s love of life. The self is forced to be reminded of the face of the other, and oscillate to and fro between the will for itself and the will for the other in order to do justice to the absolute responsibility for the other. The ethical relation occurs in the exposure of the self to the other and is an intersubjective relation that cannot be mediated by the impersonal morality or other disciplines alike. Ethics is at issue here because the self is not allowed to evade the responsibility and is not guaranteed a fulfillment of the responsibility. Levinas leads us to view our life from ethics that divests the dissimulation superimposed on the self, and slips away from the totalitarian ideology that is the source of egoism. Ethics is a face-to-face relation between the self and the other, which animates the self to take the responsibility. In the responsibility the self is deprived to the self-dispossession. That is, the more responsible (for the other) the self is, the less possessive it would be. Furthermore, since ethics highlights the individuality, there is much for the self
to do with how to respond to the other. The self is not asked to be attuned to an established morality which is too rigid to be changed, and thus too callous to be ethical. The self, who is trying to maintain the balance between the will for itself and that for the other, is at times overcome by one unleashed force more powerful than another. In this way the self is always obsessed with how to be just to the other, but paradoxically, the justice is liable to become the justification of the self (the more the self responds to the other, the more its subjectivity comes into being for the self is itself through the other) so that the more just the self, the more guilty it becomes. For Levinas, to think of ethics is to think that the self is too “stuffed with itself”\(^1\) and thus “insufficiently open” to the other. The self is never lucky enough to find peace in itself. Reified in the corporeality, the egoism is questioned, criticized, and transfigured to the self who is a hostage of the other. The body erodes the self’s immanent position; in the mean time it extends and enhances the self to a farther-reaching dimension. Thus the self is amplified by virtue of the infinite goodness in the relation to the other, but is emptier for the relation divests the self to the point of dispossession. In this way the self is “in deficit of being,” rather than in the immanence of being. The recurrence refers to the incarnation in which the body “makes giving possible [and] makes one other without alienating” (LR 99, italics original).

In conclusion, as Richard A. Cohen says that Levinas accounts for a “moral sensibility”—“the flesh” is a “suffering for the other” and “a suffering for the suffering of the other” (OB xiv), the self in incarnation is to give itself to the other. The possibility of giving in the incarnated self is revealed in the primary and concrete phenomenon—the mortality (TI 235). Mortality is a mode of existence that is in the time of “not yet,” a reprieve from death. In mortality, the self is possessive of freedom and mastery, but is enchained, committed, and submitted to the corporeality. Because of the corporeality, the self’s position of being roundly for itself is forbidden so that the self is delivered to the other as a hostage. Corporeality

\(^1\) For the other is within the self, the infinite responsibility for the other overflows the self’s being.
constitutes the self’s existence of which the self is forced to say “here I am,” to find itself somewhere in the world by being exposed to the demands of the other and taking the responsibility for the other. The self has to bear the burden of the other, to be afflicted, and to be pained. While the self folds back on itself, it does not mean the self comes to a standstill. On the contrary, the self is contested by the other to the extent that where it stands is being overturned by the other. The self-giving is to suffer for the other. The suffering is useless and pain is non-analytical because suffering or pain is like the gift that the other bestows upon the self (LR 121).

Insofar as the mortality is a mode of existence that the self confronts the other, Levinas accounts for death as a notion that is bound up with the other. For Levinas, death comes to the self as the other, whose evasive otherness, ungraspableness, unpredictability and mystery are too foreign for the self to comprehend. Death is the otherness that orients the self from egoism to its self-despite. Furthermore, since death is implicated with the otherness, the self’s death is already involved in the death of the other who is within the self. Similarly, it is the intrigue intervolvement that Levinas avers that in the other’s death, part of the self is dead as well.

For Levinas, murder is in the origin of death, because it refers to killing that aims to annihilate the other in order to operate the self’s absolute freedom, even the freedom of negating the being (Tina Chanter 202). As noted, the self’s will is itself a split into the will for itself and the will for the other. Thus when the self tries to commit suicide or kill the other, it is the collision between the will for itself and the will for the other that underlies the murderous intention. In this way, death, “in its absurdity, maintains an interpersonal order” that takes on the signification for the other (TI 234). Death arouses fear because it is unforeseeable and tyrannical “as though proceeding from a foreign will” (ibid.). In death there uncovers an order that is based on the alienation of the self’s will by the other, not “an implacable law of determinism” that governs a totality (ibid.). The invisible enemy is not part
of the self’s world. In the self’s being against death, it is in the time of postponement that still permits the self to exert its will. The will does not only adhere to the egoistic narcissism, but also surpasses the self-centered domain—the will for the foreign region, the death realm. Consequently, in death there is not only the fear of nothingness, but also the fear of the violence from the unforeseeable other. It is in the relation with the other whose irreducibility arouses the self’s fear for its being, which brings forth the self’s life the meaning beyond the self-knowledge.

As a result, murder, originally regarded as the ultimate atrocity of the self’s intentionality of self-interestedness, is at the origin of death and presupposes the subjectivity of the ego. But more importantly, in the origin of death the will to murder also implies the transference from the self-interestedness into the self-for-the-other that goes beyond the murderous intentionality—the relation between the self and the other is the significance of the self-for-the-other, even in death. Therefore what the other initially reveals to the self is to forbid the self from committing murder. The interdiction is the primary mode of relation between the self and the other.

In consequence, the self’s will is susceptible for the visible violence that threatens the self to become nothingness (for example, being swallowed up in Being), and at the same time it is also menaced by the foreign will imposed on itself. Thus Levinas says: “I am a passivity threatened not only by nothingness in my being, but by a will in my will. This is why death cannot drain all meaning from life” (TI 236). That is, apart from the self’s fear of nothingness, the meaning of its life exceeds the self-knowledge of the immanent being by being exposed to the other who distracts the self from its egoistic gravitation to the other’s calling. In other words, the self’s life is not only to satisfy its needs, but also to desire for the other surpassing its knowledge horizon. The self’s relation to the other thus transcends its own death, implanting its life the meaning more than it can comprehend. The self’s time in the relation to the other recovers “meaning despite death” (TI 236).
Thus in Levinasian ethics, death is not based on the binary structure of being and nothingness that marks the self-presence as an immanent being. On the reverse, he relates death to the other, and makes the self’s time a de-phasing process that the subjectivity comes into being not as the present-I. Rather, the subjectivity lies in the encounter occurring in the immemorial past that cannot be present and in the future that is always yet to come. In one’s life, the time is “not yet” without origin or termination. In this way, the relation with the other is not an auto-affection of the self’s consciousness of the present but is a hetero-affection that is traumatic and messianic (Newman 110). As a result, Levinas does not regard death as an event of freedom or as a negation against being, because the self is powerless rather than willful initially. In the corporeality, the self is in passivity and in exposure to the other so that it cannot apprehend anything, death included. Therefore, death, which is gravely involved with murder, is not the self’s own business but is in the irreducibility of the other who delays the end and endows the self with finite freedom bound to be responsible for the other instead of the self. By doing this, the self’s time that is kept in charge by death is uncontrollable to the self. It is the other who decides on the self’s time. And it is in the relation to the other that the self can receive new meaning. In this way, death concerns the other, and the other’s face, which forbids the self to kill, expresses the self’s moral impossibility of annihilating the other by murdering it for death does not refer to nothingness. Under such circumstances, suicide is also impossible since death is something over which the self has no power. Levinas’s mediation on death has shown that death is related to the other instead of being one’s own matter. In this sense, to kill oneself is not to fulfill one’s free will, or to escape from Being. Anyone who kills himself still links with a death for the other and reaches for a death for the other.

The Ethical Language: Language and Death

Chanter points out that Levinas connects death with language in the primordial speech
that prohibits the self from committing murder (204). According to Levinas, the first speech implicates that language is never transparent for the self to project its own thought. Rather, it is first of all a dictation from the other that the self is unable to refute. The self is not autonomous and its speech is not spontaneous. The self is inspired by the other. Moreover, since murder is related to the primordial speech, both Levinas and Blanchot consider that the speech contains the possibility to speak and to kill (ibid.). Language is a two-edged instrument used by the self to announce its singularity and at the same time to call into question the self’s immanent being. Thus Levinas says that perhaps language is most effective in disrupting the self-affirmative being.

Levinas regards the ethical language as a model of Saying and Said. Saying is the self’s exposure to the other, whose approach cannot be disavowed. As we see above, that the corporeal exposure to the other as a hostage is Saying in Levinas’s sense. It is the self’s body as irreducibility which renders the “ethical performance” that cannot be caught in a self-oriented proposition (Critchley 1992, 163). Said consists of the perspicuous statement that falsity or truth is ascertained (Critchley 1992, 164). That is, Said comprises the themes and norms that we understand as the fundamental bedrock on which we can communicate with each other through the informative discourse.

In order not to fall prey to the ontological totality, which puts everything in the synchrony, Levinas founds the relation of Saying and Said by placing it in the different temporal order. Levinas says that they are “non-simultaneous” and “incompressible” (qtd. in Critchley 1992, 165), but inalienable. We have the access to Saying only through the discourse of Said. Saying cannot present itself as a mode of Said, but is conveyed only when it is betrayed within Said. Continually contesting and interrupting Said, Saying always overturns the system of Said. Thus Levinas states: “Language is already skepticism” (OB 170). By skepticism he emphasizes that Saying disrupts the immanence of Said, causing Said to be refuted in its own statement.
It is useful for us to understand Levinas’s idea of the skepticism of language by referring to the diachronic relation between Saying and Said. According to Levinas, in Said the self’s time is a mode of synchrony which time is reduced to a linear series that the past, the present and the future are arrayed in order. By doing this the present is privileged because it can recall the past and predict the future. Such a unified temporal order can compress and represent every moment in the present. However, in Saying time is a mode of diachrony. The diachrony refers to a dispersed temporality that the present is unable to represent the past and the future. The past is immemorial, the future is unpredictable, and the present is irrepresentable. Thus in Saying the self’s time is a postponement from the “temporization” with death (Critchley 1992, 166), to which the self is bound without comprehension. Thus the self’s senescence is a passive undergoing without knowing when the future, in a sense in the regime of death, is achieved. In other words, the self cannot anticipate the future with domination. Apart from the indeterminate future, Saying in diachrony refers to an immemorial past that appears anterior to Said. Before the speech of Said, there is the ethical sincerity that the self is exposed to the other without reserve. In Saying the self is traumatized by the moral exigency that is an ethical surplus revealed through the speech of Said. Saying cannot be encapsulated in Said (Davis 76). Therefore, Said has neither specific initiation nor final conclusion because of the interruption of Saying. In the speech of Said, which tries to establish a set of knowledge or principle in the pursuance of origins and in the purpose of presenting the self, Saying inverts Said in order to re-say what is said. As Levinas says, “a saying must be unsaid” (OB 19). Therefore, Saying endlessly searches for the infinity instead of formulating the self-knowledge, history, or norm. In Saying, language is “the element which conveys meaning, [and] is also the element which engenders it, exposing it to the risk of collapsing into nonsense” (Davis 74).

Thus Saying is tantamount to the ethical relation going beyond the totality (Said) and calling into question the self’s sovereignty. Levinas states: “One must show in Saying, qua
approach, the very de-posing or de-situating of the subject, which nonetheless remains an irreplaceable uniqueness, and is thus the subjectivity of the subject” (OB 81). That is, in Saying the subject is deposed of consciousness and intentionality. Yet, the subjectivity is individuated because the self who relates to the infinity is involved in the communication that risks uncovering itself in sincerity (OB 82, 143). Hence in Saying it is the exposure of the self to the Other rather than the self’s history that is witnessed and authenticated. The self’s subjectivity lies in the relation to the other whose otherness makes Saying possible. From this perspective, in Saying the self cannot defend himself by prioritizing his personal history; rather, he is exhibited as the very one who is for-the-other (Peperzak 222). As a result, in Saying there is the signification-of-the-one-to-another that is prior to words and manifested in the responsibility for the other.

Now, with Levinasian ethics in mind, and Beckett’s general tendency in his play as discussed in the first chapter, in the following chapter I’d like to use them as my theoretical framework to examine *Endgame* as a text rendered self-contradictorily, unfurling itself as an expression wherein the otherness is manifested in dying, the senescence. My focus is not so much to explore the characters’ psychological truth belonging to the alleged self-conceived subjectivity, as to show the living force of Beckett’s theatre. Apart from the performance renovation, my discussion will also include the ethical manifestation of the text itself, in which the intersubjective relation between the characters solicits something new from the actor. It is not because of the development of the character and his characterization, but because of the relation with the Other that endows the actor with an ethical subjectivity. This is the focus of my discussion in the next chapter.