



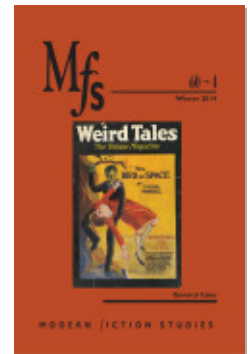
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Kanae Uchiyama

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THE DEATH OF THE OTHER: A LEVINASIAN READING OF PAUL AUSTER'S *MOON PALACE*

Kanae Uchiyama

Introduction: From Identity to Alterity

It is widely accepted that Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* echoes the familiar postmodern features—the radical decentering of identity and a skepticism toward ontological language. However, a substantial number of critics, some of whom cite Auster's emerging ethical concerns, agree that it is simplistic to classify Auster's works as postmodernist.¹ Postmodern thought, which centers on one of the great motifs of contemporary philosophical thought—the critique or the deconstruction of subjectivity—has often been criticized for its difficulty in dealing with compelling social and political issues without maintaining some notion of the subject. Terry Eagleton, for instance, in *After Theory* argues that Jacques Derrida's effort to discuss ethics and politics in the realm of deconstruction satisfies neither ethical nor political demands. Derrida asserts there can be no responsibility or ethics without passing through the ordeal of taking infinite responsibility for something that one cannot ultimately decide ("Remarks" 86).² However, Eagleton criticizes Derrida's idea—that justice is an experience of the "undecidable"—for falling outside "all given norms, forms of knowledge and modes of conceptualization" (153). Because reconciling postmodern thought with ethical issues is problematic,

Auster's fiction—where characters no longer have stable identities but still undertake moral quests—confuses some critics who have attempted to categorize his work. Patricia Merivale notes the difficulty of concurrently discussing Auster's traditional moral values and metafictional devices: "Clearly, the existentially heroic quests of the Auster protagonists . . . constitute a moral quest, although this is an inconvenience for those critics who think that a moral purpose disqualifies an author from being postmodern" (190–91).³

In the late 1970s, postmodern thought expressed great incredulity toward the democratic traditions of the Enlightenment, such as liberal humanism and rationalism. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), however, Emmanuel Levinas proclaimed that humanism should be sustained without reverting to the traditional humanist notion of the unitary subject who accepts moral obligation. He defended humanism based on the primacy of alterity, but not on our free will to take moral action:

Modern antihumanism, which denies the primacy that the human person, free and for itself, would have for the signification of being, is true over and beyond the reasons it gives itself. It clears the place for subjectivity positing itself in abnegation, in sacrifice, in a substitution which precedes the will. Its inspired intuition is to have abandoned the idea of person, goal and origin of itself, in which the ego is still a thing because it is still a being. Strictly speaking, the other is the end; I am a hostage, a responsibility and a substitution supporting the world in the passivity of assignation, even in an accusing persecution, which is undeclinable. Humanism has to be denounced only because it is not sufficiently human. (127–28)

Here, Levinas touches on the postmodern debate over "the death of the subject" and admits its justness; nonetheless, he never regards the collapse of the autonomous subject as tragic or nihilistic, but instead posits that the subject should be maintained only for the other. Levinas separates humanism from the notion of a free subject because he thinks that goodness never arises from our free will. To maintain humanism, he presents another notion of subjectivity. Just as he emphasizes that the other is the end, the subject has its origin not in itself but in the other. In other words, Levinas proposes the notion of the "passive" subject who is obligated to respond to the other's calling or demand.

I would like to show that the Levinasian conception of the subject, which suggests that deconstruction and ethics can coexist, assists in exploring ethical issues in Auster's works. Levinas's study

apprehends subjectivity not in its anguish before death, as suggested by Heidegger, but in one's responsibility before the death of the other. Levinas's foremost concern for the other's death is not irrelevant to his Judaism, nor to the fact that many of his relatives were killed by the Nazis, as he dedicates *Otherwise than Being* to the memory of the victims of the National Socialists. For Levinas, the Holocaust as an instrumentalization of the hatred of the other human being is inextricable from the Heideggerian philosophy of "Being," which demolishes the other.⁴

Auster, who grew up in America, does not write about Judaism directly. His Jewish heritage, however, seems to influence his ethical perspective, which always begins from the other's death; like Marco Stanley Fogg in *Moon Palace*, many of Auster's characters are burdened with responsibility for the other's death. Critics have generally discussed Auster's works in the dialectical choice between the loss or the unity of identity, but not from the perspective of alterity.⁵ Jeffrey T. Nealon objects to such a conventional identity politics in which "otherness" is understood negatively as "a lack of sameness" (5), or a failure to be overcome. Supporting Levinas's understanding of responsibility as engendered by the other, Nealon suggests that the notion of subjectivity, which begins from one's own identity, is connected with the desire to convert the other into sameness; Nealon therefore declares that what is necessary is not "an *identity politics* of who we are, but an *alterity politics* of how we've come to be who we are" (51).

This essay explores what Levinas calls the "passivity" of subjectivity in Auster's *Moon Palace* from the perspective of alterity and with specific attention to Levinas's ideas concerning the particular physical dimensions of hunger, nausea, sleep, sexuality, aging, and death. Further, I will refer to *Mr. Vertigo*, another of Auster's novels, to suggest that Auster's ethical perspective finally reflects on Marco's "narration" as a testimony. This would also enable us to find Jacques Derrida in the horizon that lies close to Levinas and Auster.⁶

Hand to Mouth: Is It Righteous to Be?

In Auster's works, eyesight is an especially significant human sense by which a subject establishes its relationship with the world; some of his characters try to convert the visible into language or miniature models. Auster's detective characters, Quinn and Blue, rely on sight: they watch their targets and attempt to represent them through writing. In *City of Glass*, Peter Stillman Sr has a lunatic project: to invent a new language equivalent to the destroyed things found on the streets of New York City. In *Moon Palace*, Thomas Ef-

ving—a painter who has lost his sight—needs Marco to give him a precise account of the things he points at. Ferdinand in *In the Country of Last Things* and Stone in *The Music of Chance* also appear as embodiments of optical power, obsessed with representing the world by creating perfect miniature models.

In *Moon Palace*, however, the mouth—more than the eyes—seems to be the primary physical organ. Kitty's phrase in her first meeting with Marco summarizes the narrative's focus: "It's all mouths for you, isn't it? First, the *food*, then the *words*—into the mouth and out of it. But you're forgetting the best thing mouths are made for. I'm your sister, after all, and I'm not going to let you leave without *kissing* me good-bye" (40, emphasis added). Although I suggest that the three oral activities—eating (hunger), sexuality, and narration—are ultimately related to Auster's ethical perspective, hunger is the most primitive need, and thus it is differentiated from the desire for representation embodied by a character like Peter Stillman.

How then is hunger—the desire to eat—distinguishable from the desire for representation? Martin Heidegger maintains that the hand is the first tool humans have for connecting with the world. Levinas, however, in *Time and the Other*, suggests that the world is foremost given to the mouth before it is objectified by sight or hands; in contrast to Heidegger, Levinas believes that "prior to being a system of tools, the world is an ensemble of nourishments" (63). According to Levinas, we enjoy objects as nourishments before acting on the world through the use of tools. Earth, wind, light, air, sky, and sea—things that Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* calls "the elemental"—are formless and intangible, and they come to us from nowhere; therefore, they are inherently "non-possessable" (131). Such elementals precede "the distinction between the finite and the infinite" and are "not a question of a *something*" (132). In enjoyment, we possess the other as an element that cannot be regarded as an object; therefore, the intentionality of enjoyment is separated from the intentionality of representation. Levinas's statement, "*Dasein* in Heidegger is never hungry" (134), emphasizes that the physical is the primary aspect of a human, which is "a permanent contestation of the prerogative attributed to consciousness of 'giving meaning' to each thing" (129).

In his autobiographical piece *Hand to Mouth*, whose title reminds us of the arguments of Heidegger and Levinas, Auster confesses that as a member of the middle class, he never suffered any deprivations. Nonetheless, under the influence of his parents, who lived through the Depression, "money was a subject of continual conversation and worry" (6). He actually experienced "a constant, grinding, almost suffocating lack of money" in his late twenties and early thirties (3).

But why does the protagonist of *Moon Palace*, Marco Stanley Fogg, plunge himself into self-imposed starvation, refusing to work? As I argue later, while a few critics connect Auster's hunger motif with his Jewishness, both nausea and hunger can be understood as the first steps in Marco's ethical quest.

Marco's autobiographical narration does not provide clear reasons for his self-starvation in his youth, but his remark on the related physical experience is noteworthy: "All kinds of options were available to people in my situation—scholarships, loans, work-study programs—but once I began to think about them, I found myself stricken with disgust. It was a sudden, involuntary response, a jolting attack of nausea" (20). Levinas, in *On Escape*, defines nausea as the phenomenon of malaise for the "weight of the being that is crushed by itself" or the "condemnation to be oneself" (70):

There is in nausea a refusal to remain there, an effort to get out. Yet this effort is always already characterized as desperate: in any case, it is so for any attempt to act or to think. And this despair, this fact of being riveted, constitutes all the anxiety of nausea. In nausea—which amounts to an impossibility of being what one is—we are at the same time riveted to ourselves, enclosed in a tight circle that smothers. We are there, and there is nothing more to be done, or anything to add to this fact that we have been entirely delivered up, that everything is consumed. (66–67)

Throughout *On Escape*, Levinas criticizes the bourgeois spirit or Western philosophy based on the unity of "I [*moi*]," which is "given to peace with itself, completes itself, closes on and rests upon itself" (49). Levinas insists that Western philosophy has never gone beyond the concept of the I being self-sufficient, but that nausea indicates an effort to escape from the sufficiency of being—that is, the need to break the "*most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I [*moi*] is oneself [*soi-même*]" (55). Levinas emphasizes that nausea is not a normal need to satisfy the lack of being, but rather a specific need to release from "a plenitude of being" (69). Marco, after his uncle's death, often suffers from nausea and vomiting. Is it not possible to explain Marco's nausea as his subconscious attempt to escape from his existence—namely, the agony that he must continue being himself, even after losing his only family?*

Just as many of Auster's characters lose their beloveds, Marco is a survivor who has lost his dearest uncle. Levinas considers mourning the death of the other a chance to interrupt ontology—the perseverance of being in its being. In his interview with François Poirié, Levinas proclaims that the notion that I am responsible for the other's death

is not unreasonable and says, "[B]eing affected by the death of the other is the remarkable and essential event of my psychism as human psychism" (Levinas, *Is It Righteous* 53). Levinas's distinctive idea is a query as to whether it is just that others die while he is still alive.

Such a sense of guilt over the possibility of crushing the other seems to appear in *Moon Palace*. Marco's concern for occupying a place that should be left for others is exposed when he visits a fellow student, David Zimmer. He has already moved from the room where students at the Juilliard School of Music have breakfast. The starving Marco, invited to join them by Kitty Wu (later his girlfriend), makes an extra place for himself and eats almost all their food. In compensation, Marco entertains them by narrating Cyrano's voyage to the moon, but then suddenly feels nauseated and leaves their presence. Marco fails to fully explain the reason for his voluntary hunger, but his body seems to hint at a question about the justness of his being and possession.

Derek Rubin points out that Auster's theme of hunger originates in his Jewish identity.⁷ He remarks that Auster's "Jewish trait of longing, of yearning, of 'hunger'" is at the core of his "perception of the self and of the individual's relation to the world around him" (61). As Rubin argues, the protagonist of *The Invention of Solitude* longs to fill the space created by his father's absence, but it also seems possible to explore Auster's Jewishness with regard to the Levinasian question, to consider the justice of being rather than a desire to fill in a blank. Marco recalls his self-hunger and says, "I invented countless reasons at the time, but in the end it probably boiled down to despair" (20). If it is possible to interpret Marco's despair as disgust for the impossibility of escaping his being, Marco's self-inflicted hunger and nausea can be regarded as a refusal to digest the other in order to maintain his being.

However, for Levinas, the other as nourishment is not alterity in a strict sense, because while alterity is never possessed, nourishment is converted into sameness through digestion. For Levinas, eating—namely enjoying nourishment—is never unethical. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas mentions that only "a subject that eats can be for-the-other": the subject can be ethical by "snatching the bread from one's mouth" and giving it to the other (74), but to do so, the subject should be made of flesh and blood by eating. Indeed, Marco's ethical perspective—that is to say, to respect the other's "otherness"—is pursued through such physical dimensions as sleep, sexuality, and the other's death. By focusing on physical fragility throughout the novel, Auster seems to reveal that the human is corporeality itself, prior to representing the world.

Sleep—Eros—Fecundity: Departure from "Existing without Existents"

As Levinas says, "nausea discovers only the nakedness of being in its plenitude and in its utterly binding presence" (*Escape* 67). Since Marco cannot find the exit from his being by vomiting, the way to escape "the chains of the I to the self" seems to be shown in Marco's sleep and a withdrawal into a closed space. After losing his apartment and then living in Central Park, Marco finds a "natural cave" (69) formed by a cluster of large rocks wherein he sleeps for a few days until he is rescued by Kitty and Zimmer. Later in retrospect, Marco links his long sleep with the sleep of Jonah, the prophet of the Hebrew bible. When asked how many days he had slept in the cave, Marco says "three," only because three is "the same number of days that Jonah spent in the belly of the whale" (69). Auster repeatedly refers to Jonah, who sleeps in the whale's belly for three days in "The Book of Memory" of *The Invention of Solitude*, a work that describes various images of enclosed space: the rooms of Anne Frank, Emily Dickinson, and Friedrich Hölderlin, or the belly of the shark, locking Gepetto and Pinocchio. Such an enclosed space often appears in Auster's other works as well, like *City of Glass*, *The Locked Room*, or *The Music of Chance*; many of his characters in those works finally return to enclosed spaces after exploring outside spaces. Auster describes quite a few nomadic characters—Quinn, Fanshawe, Nashe, Walt, Sachs, and Orr—most of whom hold neither possessions nor habitations. Staying in one place, however, is not necessarily a negative thing for Auster; indeed, many of his characters change their relationships with others by perfecting their solitude in closed spaces. Levinas shows that the dead end of escape from the weight of being is not to be found outside, but instead can be accessed by withdrawing into oneself. Auster also seems to think that the closed space functions as a place of rebirth, as he sees Jonah's seclusion as a positive thing. In fact, Marco realizes that he needs to atone for his "errors" in refusing all human contact through withdrawing into the cave and leaving the enclosure (73), just like Jonah, who fulfills his responsibility after awakening from his sleep in the whale's belly.

How, then, can Jonah's and Marco's sleep be explained as occasions of recovering a relationship with the other? Jonah is ordered to go to Nineveh and tell people to repent and change their ways, but he refuses to deliver the message to the heathens and attempts to run away from God. Thrown into the sea and swallowed by a large fish, Jonah is enclosed in its belly for three days and nights. Just as Auster positively views Jonah's time in the closed space, his act of lying down in one place, so does Levinas regard positively the oppor-

tunity to interrupt one's being in the world. Perhaps Levinas's notion of the *il y a* can assist us here.⁸ Realizing the impossibility of hiding himself from God, Jonah stops fleeing to the outside and withdraws into himself. By placing himself in one place, Jonah finds "a dimension of retreat" (*Existence* 64) in anonymous vigilance. Jonah's withdrawal into a private domain gives him the chance to detach himself—as an interval or interruption of being, but not as a negation of being.⁹

Levinas considers Shakespearean tragedy to have depersonalized the horror of being alive. Macbeth suffers from a horror of ghosts: "[T]he apparition of Banquo's ghost is also a decisive experience of the 'no exit' from existence, its phantom return through the fissures through which one has driven it." Likewise, Hamlet's fear of "not to be" is not anguish over death but the horror of the universality of existence: Hamlet has "a forboding of the return of being ('to dye, to sleepe, perchance to Dreame')" (*Existence* 57). Levinas obviously distinguishes the horror that a subject has over being depersonalized from Heidegger's anguish over death.

Similarly, Jonah seems to feel a horror over the impossibility of death. Levinas calls Jonah "the hero of impossible escapes, invoker of nothingness and death" (*Existence* 64). Jonah, who cannot escape God, is not allowed to die. By giving up his death, Jonah must accept that he is the only person chosen by God. The theme that one must answer the other's calling leads to the notion of Levinasian subjectivity; Levinas considers that the impossibility of escaping God brings to Jonah a subjectivity based on "an absolute passivity" (*Otherwise* 128). Jonah is not one to take the initiative in making his own decisions, but rather is a "passive" subject whose singularity is enacted only in the relationship with the other (that is, in this case, God).¹⁰ Marco, who awakes from a deep sleep in the cave, is obviously compared to Jonah.

As we have seen, Marco's self-imposed hunger and sleep have philosophical connotations. His ethical relationship with the other is also examined in another physical dimension, eros. Marco likens his sexual relationship with Kitty to "some dramatic crumbling of inner walls, an earthquake in the heart of my solitude" (94). Touching with the mouth and hand—resembling a gesture of eating—resembles the desire to possess the beloved. For Levinas, however, eros is not about possession of the other, since the beloved is not "an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery" (*Time* 86). He illustrates that eros arrests the return of the I to itself:

In voluptuosity the other is me and separated from me. The separation of the Other in the midst of this community of feeling constitutes the acuity of voluptuosity. The

voluptuous in voluptuosity is not the freedom of the other tamed, objectified, reified, but his freedom untamed, which I nowise desire objectified. But it is freedom desired and voluptuous not in the clarity of his face, but in the obscurity. . . . Nothing is further from *Eros* than possession. (*Totality* 265)

Here, Levinas uses the theme of light and darkness to explain that the beloved is never objectified in luminosity. Levinas criticizes Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology—a dependence on "light" and "vision"—to illuminate the hidden and achieve a comprehension of being. Light that makes objects comprehensible and thus "makes them belong to us" (*Existence* 40) is the origin of knowing and possession.

Just as Levinas does, Auster obviously connects luminosity with the desire to represent and possess. Especially in *The New York Trilogy*, Auster's detective characters repeatedly pursue the representation of the other through eyesight. Nonetheless, *Moon Palace* seems to be Auster's primary novel in emphasizing the feminine as the other who escapes illumination. The female characters (Kitty, Emily, and Elizabeth) have important roles in *Moon Palace* in that they appear as the other who cannot be absorbed into the subject. Kitty, who majors in dance, appears as a woman beyond Marco's apprehension. Marco likes to watch her body as she dances onstage, but at the same time he realizes that Kitty's illuminated body cannot be described; he says, "I did not understand it. Dancing was utterly foreign to me, a thing that stood beyond the grasp of words, and I was left with no choice but to sit there in silence, abandoning myself to the spectacle of pure motion" (96). Kitty's body is visible in the luminosity but could never be diminished to a representation.

Levinas, using the idea of virginity, further explains that the loved one who looks graspable is never comprehensible: "The virgin remains ungraspable, dying without murder, swooning, withdrawing into her future, beyond every possible promised to anticipation" (*Totality* 258). If she really dies, she loses her alterity, but she seems to retain her alterity into the extreme when she nearly comes to death via a "quasi-death." On their wedding day, Effing's virgin wife, Elizabeth, refuses sex with "tears and struggle, fits of screaming, disgust" (150) and nearly falls apart. But Elizabeth's real resistance is found not in her refusal of sex but in her unpredictable attitude: she tries to prevent Effing's subsequent adventure by having sex with him. Effing says, "I still don't understand it. You'd think she would have been glad to get rid of me. An unpredictable woman she was, always doing the opposite of what you'd expect" (152). The virgin is ungraspable not because she refuses to be objectified, but because her alterity,

the unpredictability of the future, escapes from sovereignty. The three women of *Moon Palace*—Kitty, Emily, and Elizabeth—oppose Marco, Barber, and Effing not with forces of resistance, but through the very unpredictability of their actions: Kitty refuses to give birth against Marco's will, and Emily and Elizabeth have babies unknown to Barber and Effing.

In *Moon Palace*, Auster tests not only eros but also paternity as ways of arresting the return of the I to the self. In his interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, Auster declares that to become a parent is to have a sense of time beyond oneself (*Art* 305). As I see it, *Moon Palace* prominently pursues the intersection of subjectivity and time through the father-son relationship. Likewise, Levinas in his early writings expects "fecundity" as well as eros to break up the condemnation of identification: the "son is not only my work, like a poem or an object, nor is he my property. Neither the categories of power nor those of knowledge describe my relation with the child" (*Totality* 277). In his many works, Auster depicts fathers who have lost their sons and sons who have lost their fathers. Especially in *Moon Palace*, the failure to have sons is repeated in the family history of three male characters. Effing and Barber overlook the possibility of becoming fathers and leave Elizabeth and Emily, while Marco goes on an expedition to the West, leaving behind Kitty, who has had an abortion. Why do they suffer from the absence of father or child? Through describing the difficulty of establishing a consecutive father-son relationship, Auster seems especially to emphasize that the father as the other is doomed to aging and death.

Among the three men, Effing appears as the most capitalistic character who has a talent for controlling the indeterminacy of the future—although ironically he has a son outside his recognition. In his youth, Effing has faith in the American inventor Nikola Tesla, the incarnation of the "total conquest of nature" (144), and he explores the West with his friend's son, Edward Byrne. Recalling his adventure, Effing admits that such a pursuit to conquer the other is typical in Western history. He says that "the last bits of the continent, the blank spaces no one had explored" were destined to be absorbed by "the great American profit machine" (149).

Effing's occupation as a painter also symbolically implies that he embodies American capitalist development, whose first philosophy is to occupy whatever space has the potential to produce a benefit. The theme of Effing's painting, "the force of light" (150), is associated with possessing the visible. However, in the Great Salt Desert, Effing seems to go through the horror of *il y a*.¹¹ Painting requires the ability to recognize objects in their space, and the distance between a painter and those objects is crucial to doing so. Effing explains

how the tremendously vast desert has deprived him of the ability to grasp the world:

The mountains, the snow on top of the mountains, the clouds hovering around the snow. After a while, *they began to merge together and I couldn't tell them apart. Whiteness, and then more whiteness. How can you draw something if you don't know it's there?* You see what I'm talking about, don't you? *It didn't feel human anymore.* The wind would blow so hard that you couldn't hear yourself think, and then it would suddenly stop, and the air would be so still, you'd stand there wondering if you hadn't gone deaf. *Unearthly silence*, Fogg. (155, emphasis added)

Effing admits that his sight is inadequate for representing "[a]ll that bloody silence and emptiness" (156). What he discovers in the desert is not objects that can be grasped by recognition. Effing, who has lost his only companion Byrne—a "sign" that he is still attached to the same world in which other people live—falls into the same horror as Marco's after Uncle Victor's death; he tells of how his absolute solitude scared him in the extreme (161). Like Marco, Effing is troubled by nausea arising from "the loathing he felt for himself" on returning from the desert (186). Perhaps as an attempt to escape from his being, Effing forsakes his real name (Julian Barber) and refuses to return to his family.

The Aging Body: The Responsibility of Answering the Other's Demand

While depicting Effing as the embodiment of an identity politics that incorporates the alterity of the other into the same, Auster draws our attention to Effing's grotesque body, in contrast to his tremendous power to grasp the future. Marco describes Effing's body in detail:

The first time I set eyes on Thomas Effing, he struck me as the frailest person I had ever seen. All bones and trembling flesh, he sat in his wheelchair covered in plaid blankets, his body slumped to one side like some minuscule broken bird. . . . Two gnarled, liver-spotted hands gripped the armrests of the chair and occasionally fluttered into movement, but that was the only sign of conscious life. You could not even make visual contact with him, for Effing was blind, or at least he pretended to be blind, and on the day I went to his house for the interview, he was wearing two black patches over his eyes. (99)

In their first meeting, Effing tells Marco that he has a "force of will that can bend the physical world into any shape" he wants. Nevertheless, his miserable body reveals that his faith in "[m]ental powers" cannot overcome his aging and disabilities (104). In fact, Effing considers his disabled legs a sign that he has been punished for his past. He tells Marco that he has been overwhelmed by "guilt" (186), which seems to refer to his failure to save young Edward Byrne, the murder of the Gresham brothers, and his abandonment of his own family. Knowing that he has been eternally disabled by someone he had not seen, he feels "relief" for the payment of his crime. (188)

Ilana Shiloh points out Effing's duality—"the power of a capricious, omniscient God" and "the impotence of a helpless child" (126). Although he is one of Auster's most vigorous characters, blind and disabled, Effing must rely on Marco and Mrs. Hume in his daily life. His duality seems to be the epitome of the novel that develops through the tension between the capitalistic power of dominating the other and the fragility of the body. Effing is something of an irony, but he does show deep compassion for Marco's pain at having lost his mother in an accident. Effing is also a survivor who has lost a beloved; talking about his friend Pavel Shum, Effing says, "[T]he only thing I regret is that I didn't die before he died. The man was the one true friend I ever had" (119). Marco begins to see Effing as "a man haunted by his past, struggling to hide some secret anguish that was devouring him from within" (117). Effing's physicality, doomed to death, finally exceeds his priority of consciousness, even if he succeeds in controlling his body so as to die on the date he has chosen.

Auster also draws our attention to Solomon Barber's uncontrollable body. Barber, who has concentrated on eating to fill the absence of his father and Emily, finally becomes "an ambulatory freak show, the balloon boy" exposed by others' gazes and laughter (240). Barber is clearly forced to live against his will; while he is an excellent scholar, his fat body pushes him into "a passive relation with himself." In addition to gaining weight, Barber's changing appearance from losing his hair is also "thoroughly beyond his control" (243). The gradually changing bodies of the two men cannot be controlled through cognitive power.

The uncontrollable bodies-beyond-consciousness motif seems to be a clue worth examining to better understand Auster's ethical motif in *Moon Palace*. Levinas, in *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity*, explains that both eros and having a son—a relationship influenced by the indeterminacy of the future—enable us to escape our egoism. In *Otherwise than Being*, however, ideas concerning eros and fecundity disappear and the subject is considered in the context of its relationship with the other's aging and vulnerable body.

Surprisingly, parallel to Levinas's development, Auster finally seems to find Marco's inescapable responsibility for the other (Barber and Effing) in his confrontation with their aging and deaths.

Moon Palace has the aspect of a bildungsroman in that it focuses on how young Marco changes after his uncle's death, but his real change does not originate in his discovery of a grandfather and father. After learning the truth at his mother's grave, Marco hesitates to accept that Barber is his father since he has lived embracing the enigma of his origin as the central fact that defines himself, "clinging to it as a source of knowledge and self-respect, trusting in it as an ontological necessity" (295). Just as Marco sees the absence of his origin as his essence, our own focus is based on the distinction of being or not. At the beginning of *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas points out that our attention is captured by "to be not or to be" because our language is woven about the verb to be (4). Levinas attempts to expose "otherwise than being" beyond both being and nothing by introducing the crucial idea of diachrony, which indicates that the subject never shares the same time with the other, even when in the presence of the other. I suggest that Marco becomes the subject in a way that differs from how he knows his origin. Here, the Jonah motif is once again repeated. Effing says to Marco, "Like it or not, you're the only listener I have" (131). Barber also gives Marco "an exhaustive and meticulous account of his whole life" until he dies at a hospital (294). Marco is the subject—not because he can choose to be the only listener for them, but because he is depicted like Jonah, whose uniqueness lies in the impossibility of his being replaced.

Levinas's distinguished theme—that the I cannot help but answer to the other's call—is explained from the viewpoint of sensibility or vulnerability. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas considers the body to be an organ that converts the other (nourishment) into my possession; that is, the body is "to be *me* though living in the *other*." In other words, the body is "the very self-possession" (117). In *Otherwise than Being*, however, Levinas reconsiders the body, which aims at self-preservation by enjoying nourishment but simultaneously cancels self-identification by aging. Levinas's subject cannot be described on the basis of intentionality, representational activity, freedom, or will, but rather on "the diachronic temporality of ageing" (53)—a "senescence beyond the recuperation of memory" (52). Levinas considers breathing, the "restlessness of respiration" (180), an opening of the self to the other:

That the emptiness of space would be filled with invisible air, *hidden from perception*, save in the caress of the wind or the threat of storms, *non-perceived* but penetrating me even in the retreats of my inwardness, that this invisibility

or this emptiness would be breathable or horrible, that this invisibility is non-indifferent and obsesses me *before all thematization*, that the simple ambiance is imposed as an atmosphere to which the subject gives himself and exposes himself in his lungs, *without intentions and aims*, that the subject could be a lung at the bottom of its substance—all this signifies a subjectivity that suffers and offers itself before taking a foothold in being. It is a *passivity*, wholly a supporting. (180, emphasis added)

Levinas emphasizes that we are susceptible to being hurt and exposed in the lungs without perceiving it. By breathing, the subject enjoys the other (air), while at the same time being exposed to the air and aging; in this way, the process of maintaining the self becomes the process of losing the self.

Auster also provides an example of such a contradiction in breathing. In *The Locked Room*, Fanshawe recounts an anecdote about Peter Freuchen—the famous Arctic explorer who is trapped by a blizzard in northern Greenland and who builds an igloo to wait out the storm, only to realize that with his every breath freezing to the walls, his little shelter is growing smaller and smaller. Fanshawe states that Freuchen's situation is more frightening and compelling than that found in Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, for "the instrument of that destruction is the very thing he needs to keep himself alive. For surely a man cannot live if he does not breathe. But at the same time, he will not live if he does breathe" (300–01). This story has a profound impact on Fanshawe in that the explorer's effort to maintain his body ultimately leads to his death. In *Moon Palace*, it is also possible to say that Barber, who accidentally falls into a deep hole, has thrust himself to his death, owing to his massive weight. Effing is attacked and wounded without hearing the attacker come up from behind him. Both Barber and Effing have already been wounded before they realize it; such physical vulnerability precedes the intentionality of consciousness.

Levinas extracts one's unexceptionable responsibility through the other's aging body, which escapes one's representation. He wholly develops the unique idea through the face of a neighbor—which signifies an absolute responsibility for me that precedes every free agreement or free contract. The other's face seems to be "graspable" by my sight, and yet it refuses synthesis and contemporaneity with me. In the obsession with its withdrawal, aging, and death, a face weighted down with a wrinkled skin is already absent from itself and "fallen into the past with an unrecoverable lapse" (*Otherwise* 89). My reaction to a neighbor's face misses a present that is already the past of itself; I never share a common present with a neighbor,

and my delay behind him is irrecoverable. His face therefore escapes representation.¹² In the obsession with the face of a neighbor, I am already late and guilty for being late.

A Talent for Believing the Other

So far I have discussed the intersection between the passivity of subjectivity and the vulnerable body in *Moon Palace*, yet I want to suggest that Marco's very narrative is his inescapable and ethical response to the other. It should be noted that *Moon Palace* is narrated by Marco, a survivor who has lost his whole family. Marco's narrative is based on his belief in "the very outrageousness" of Effing's story. To confirm the truth of Effing's incredible story and perhaps also recover the connection with their lost ancestry, Barber and Marco go to Utah and seek out the cave where Effing survived. Their attempt ends in failure, and Marco stops wondering whether Effing's story is true or not, saying "My own story was just as preposterous as Effing's, but I knew that if I ever chose to tell it to him, he would have believed every word I said" (183). Marco avoids having to confront Kitty's indeterminacy by leaving her, but he seems to open himself to the other by accepting the stories of Effing and Barber as true, without any supporting evidence.

Leaving our discussion of why one has a duty to answer the other, we come next to considering how one answers the other. Although some reviewers have criticized *Moon Palace* for its unlikely coincidences or unbelievable plot,¹³ I argue that how one believes the other's incredible stories functions as an ethical response to the other. Indeed, Marco, who lost his home and spends time in Central Park, is fortuitously found by his friends, who have had no clue as to his whereabouts. Effing also happens to discover a stock of provisions in a cave just as he expects to die in the Great Salt Desert. Both these characters accidentally encounter fortune when they are in serious crises. Furthermore, the orphan Marco discovers his grandfather and father without making any effort to find them. Steven Weisenburger, however, believes that these extreme coincidences work to bring out a renunciation of "paternal authority" and "genealogical determinations" in *Moon Palace* (140). He seems to consider that chances for innovation toward the other exist in "the gaps that a determinist or genealogical metaphysics would seek to banish" (141), as symbolically shown in Ralph Albert Blakelock's painting *Moonlight*. I agree with Weisenburger—that coincidences function as an indeterminacy of alterity in *Moon Palace*—and further suggest that Auster's trademark of incredible narrative, which is so often full of coincidences, works as a pivot by which he practices his ethical pursuit.

To show how believing the other unconditionally constitutes the Levinasian subject in Auster's fiction, here I would like to refer to *Mr. Vertigo*, which is also a first-person story narrated by a survivor, Walter Claireborne Rawley. Just as Marco needs the experience of hunger and nausea as a first step in opening himself to the other, Walt's ethical relationship seems to be awakened through physical agony. Taken to a farm on the Kansas plains, Walt starts a new life but cannot conceal his suspicions about Master Yehudi, who has promised to teach him how to walk in the air. Running away from the farm and arriving in Wichita, Walt seeks help at Mrs. Witherspoon's house, where he finds Master Yehudi by chance. Walt realizes the impossibility of escaping from his master and falls into sickness, which Master Yehudi calls "the Ache of Being" (34). This experience seems symbolically similar to Marco's nausea as a trial of escaping from being, for after surviving "the Ache of Being," Walt comes to follow his master's commands "with blind obedience" (45) and learns to interrupt his being.

Trusting in the other in the absence of any solid reason for doing so—which is inevitable in the formation of the ethical subject—is described in the relationship between Master Yehudi and his pupil Walt. Levinas, in *Time and the Other*, discusses the feminine and having a child—that is, the relation of the infinite future establishes an ethical relation with the other that is not turned into a power relation. In *Totality and Infinity* as well as in *Time and the Other*, Levinas continues to discuss eros and fecundity, but he presents another relationship that arrests the return of the I to itself—my relationship with the "master" (121). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas discusses the relationship between master and I through dialogue or teaching. The relationship between Master Yehudi and Walt is also based on language: Walt says, "[T]he master's words had power, and they hurt just as much as any blow to the head" (17). Levinas considers teaching to be a nonviolent model for establishing an ethical relationship with the other: he points out that the master's "alterity is manifested in a mastery that does not conquer, but teaches. Teaching is not a species of a genus called domination, a hegemony at work within a totality, but is the presence of infinity breaking the closed circle of totality" (*Totality* 171).

Levinas makes it clear that language does not promise an easy mode of communication that presupposes mutual understanding. Dialogue via language bears possibilities for misunderstanding; therefore, the relationship between I and the other (master) is asymmetrical:

The "communication" of ideas, the reciprocity of dialogue, already hide the profound essence of language. It resides in the irreversibility of the relation between me and the other,

in the Mastery of the Master coinciding with his position as other and as exterior. For language can be spoken only if the interlocutor is the commencement of his discourse, if, consequently, he remains beyond the system, if he is not *on the same plane* as myself. (*Totality* 101)

The relationship between I and the master is never reversible, because the master's speech is beyond my understanding: "He who speaks to me and across the words proposes himself to me retains the fundamental foreignness of the Other who judges me" (*Totality* 101). Because it is impossible to confirm whether the master's teaching is completely understood, the relationship between master and I is asymmetrical; I have to admit there is an "infinite" someone who is not generalized or totalized by my knowledge. To approach the other in conversation, especially to be taught, is to "receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I" (*Totality* 51). My singularity as the subject is derived from the relationship with the master, because I am merely allowed to interpret my master's teaching in my original way, which cannot be replaced by any other person. If a student can understand his master perfectly, it is possible for other students to understand the master in the same way. If so, I cannot maintain my singularity. Thus, the relationship with the master as infinite other constitutes one model of the ethical relation beyond my possession or intentionality.

Walt recalls his blind trust in Master Yehudi and compares their relationship to that of Abraham and Isaac; he relates the time when he was buried alive in his first training: "I felt nothing but trust for him at that moment. . . . That's probably how Isaac felt when Abraham took him up that mountain in Genesis, chapter twenty-two" (41). Abraham, ordered by God to sacrifice his son, takes Isaac to the top of the mountain and proceeds to obey God without understanding what God truly means. Walt compares himself to Isaac, but he also bears a similarity with Abraham in the sense that he obeys Master Yehudi without knowing what his master intends to do. Walt obeys his master's orders, "never bothering to question what his purpose might have been" (45).

In "The Trace of the Other," Levinas greatly admires Abraham, who leaves his home country and never returns, in comparison to Ulysses, who returns to his native island after his adventures (348–49). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas also criticizes "the structure of the subject which from every adventure returns to its island, like Ulysses" (271). Like Abraham, Ulysses leaves home, but he also aims to return home with stories of having overpowered others he encountered during his adventure. He is the subject of power and possession. The difference between the two persons is that Abraham

is the passive subject who responds to the calling of the infinite other (God) and leaves his land without knowing God's purpose, whereas Ulysses is the initiative subject who converts others to his identity. Walt, who receives the other's orders without any explanation for why he needs to carry them out, reminds us of Abraham, on whom God imposes an enigma.

Walt's bodily passivity is not digested by consciousness. Walt calls his patience during training "a brainless passivity that lurked somewhere in the core of my soul" (44). By going through training involving physical agony, he learns to put himself in "the proper trance" (66). As Walt says at the end of his story, to "stop being yourself" (293) perhaps makes it possible to fly. Walt's levitation seems to be a consequence of loving, which enables him to be closer, to gain proximity, to the other. In the final stage of successfully performing his first levitation, Walt is afraid of losing his master and yearns for his love: "I hungered for the master's affections, and no amount of food was ever going to satisfy me" (56–57). Similarly, Levinas separates the "need" to be satisfied from the "desire" that is never satisfied: "[I]n need, I can sink my teeth into the real and satisfy myself in assimilating the other; in Desire there is no sinking one's teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me" (*Totality* 117). Walt, who has lived to satisfy mere physical needs like "an animal" (3), learns that his master is beyond his possession—a lesson that seems necessary to be able to fly.

Carsten Springer believes that the "uncertainty concerning the truth value of the story" weakens the model of Walt's biography as "a variant of the *bildungsroman*" (184). As we have seen, however, a talent for trusting the other beyond one's cognitive power seems to be requisite for describing the ethical relationship in *Mr. Vertigo*. Walt himself thinks that few people accept his story as the truth: "Every word in these thirteen books is true, but I'd bet both my elbows there aren't a hell of a lot of people who'd swallow that" (290). Auster's narrators, Marco and Walt, present incredible stories that are often dominated by coincidences, but if retaining the alterity of the other is connected, in their minds, to a transcendence beyond being, it is possible to posit that Auster dares to stress the incredibility of narratives.

The motif of accepting the other's narrative as the truth, whatever its verisimilitude, also appears in Auster's "Auggie Wren's Christmas Story." The original short story, written for the *New York Times* in 1990, was developed into the film *Smoke*, directed by Wayne Wang. At the end of the Christmas story, Auggie Wren presents a true story to Paul Benjamin, who seeks a nice Christmas story for the *New York Times*. In both the original story and the screenplay,

Benjamin doubts the veracity of Auggie's story, but in the original first-person story, Benjamin proclaims that he accepts Auggie's story as truth, perhaps because he feels that believing his friend is imposed on him: "I was about to ask him if he'd been putting me on, but then I realized he would never tell. I had been tricked into believing him, and that was the only thing that mattered. As long as there's one person to believe it, there's no story that can't be true" (34). Benjamin decides to believe Auggie, although the truth of the story is undecidable. However, there seems to be an ethical aspect when Auggie's narrative lacks omnipotent knowledge and calls into question the possibility that it cannot be entirely trusted.

Mr. Vertigo also reveals how difficult it is to believe the other. For Walt, the incredible nature of Master Yehudi's teaching is magnified by the ordeal that Walt's narrative itself is unconvincing. Derrida, in "Demeure: Fiction and Testimony," suggests the difficulty of judging whether Blanchot's "The Instant of My Death" is autobiography or fiction. He argues, however, that it is impossible to remove falsehood from all testimonies:

But if the testimony always claims to testify in truth to the truth for the truth, it does not consist, for the most part, in sharing a knowledge, in making known, in informing, in speaking true. As a promise to *make truth*, according to Augustine's expression, where the witness must be irreplaceably alone, where the witness alone is capable of dying his own death, testimony always goes hand in hand with at least the *possibility* of fiction, perjury, and lie. Were this possibility to be eliminated, no testimony would be possible any longer; it could no longer have the meaning of testimony. If testimony is passion, that is because it will always *suffer* both having, undecidably, a connection to fiction, perjury, or lie and never being able or obligated—without ceasing to testify—to become a proof. (27–28)

Only the witness knows, and it is impossible to prepare someone as a substitute to testify; therefore, he cannot remove the possibility of falseness from his testimony. Derrida calls such a witness's suffering, in which he has been chosen by the environment, "the passivity of passion before or beyond the opposition between passivity and activity" (26). Derrida's idea of passive situation as "passion" is also illustrated in another way. In "Ulysses Gramophone: Here Say Yes in Joyce," Derrida argues that Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses* does not mean that she is alone; instead, he emphasizes that her "yes" is always an answer to the other. "Yes" is most enigmatic in its grammatical and semantic status because it names nothing, describes nothing.

Yet, it implies "an 'implicit believer' in some summons of the other" ("Ulysses" 265). Molly's "yes" is toward the indefinite other, even if there is nobody around her. That is, "yes" breaches time and space. In addition, *yes* is not necessarily affirmative and can be negative, or rather, *yes* is prior to the dialectic between negation and affirmation. As Derrida suggests: "The minimal, primary *yes*, the telephonic 'hello' or the tap through a prison wall, marks, before meaning or signifying: 'I-here,' listen, answer, there is some mark, there is some other. Negatives may ensue, but even if they completely take over, this *yes* can no longer be erased" (*Acts* 298).¹⁴

Derrida's idea on "passion" or "yes prior to the dialect between yes and no" is similar to the Levinasian sensible subject as a hostage obsessed with the responsibility of answering the other's calling prior to noticing it. In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida further argues that the approach of the other's death only gives one the experience of "irreplaceable singularity" (51), which deduces one's infinite responsibility for the other. However, I will never be responsible enough for the infinite gift left by the other because I am a finite mortal. In *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida does not give a final answer to the heritage left by Levinas. Derrida speaks to the unspecified others behind Levinas, who has passed away: "How is one to interpret this hospitality *in the name* of Levinas? How might one do so by speaking, not in his place and in his name, but along with him, speaking with him as well, first by listening to him today?" (19). Derrida does not hope to preserve Levinas's notion of subject as hospitality as a fixed, limited one, but receives it instead as a gift that should be shared and developed by each of us in unique ways. Therefore, Derrida's deconstructive reading of text as alterity can be understood as his successive effort to disrupt the language of ontology.

Moon Palace, like *Mr. Vertigo*, is narrated by a survivor who cannot prepare for a witness that supports his story's authenticity. Being the only listener of the stories told by Effing and Barber, Marco experiences the decision of undecidability in believing their implausible stories and further has to be burdened with the passion that he might be a liar by narrating without any proof. However, Marco answers the other with his irreplaceable singularity when he narrates about Effing and Barber according to his own interpretation. Marco's narrative, which functions as an answer to a heritage left behind by the deceased, sounds unrealistic and incredible; however, it is not a final answer, but rather a response containing another question or mystery that can serve as a gift for readers to interpret in another way. When presenting the heritage from the other to the third other, Marco's narration, in posing another question, seems to suggest an ethical effort to disrupt ontological language.¹⁵

By introducing the thought of Levinas, which never illustrates subjectivity from the perspective of free will, Auster's ethical aspect opens his fiction beyond the categories of postmodernism and traditional humanism. In *Moon Palace* especially Auster's emphasis on the other's death enables him to describe his character from the perspective of alterity but not identity.¹⁶ As such Auster's Levinasian encounter with otherness interrupts the ontological understanding of language as merely a function of representation, revealing language to be an ethical engagement that moves the self beyond the limits of humanist identity politics.¹⁷

Notes

An earlier version of this essay appeared as part of chapters two and three in my doctoral dissertation, "The Ethical Subject after Postmodernism: A Levinasian Reading of Paul Auster's Fictions," submitted to Japan Women's University in November, 2005.

1. For critics who note Auster's moral aspects, see Dennis Barone, Carsten Springer, William Lavender, William Dow, Pascal Bruckner, Patricia Merivale, and Steven Weisenburger. Dennis Barone, for example, observes that "[r]esponsibility, old-fashioned as [it] may sound, is a virtue of Auster's works" ("Introduction" 15).
2. In *Ethics—Politics—Subjectivity*, Simon Critchley believes that Derrida's idea on justice is "to recognize one's infinite responsibility before the singular other as something over which one cannot ultimately decide, as something that exceeds my cognitive powers" (100). Each of the self's decisions must be made in relation to the "singularity" of the other; therefore, each time a self decides, it must invent a new rule. Critchley calls such a response to the singular demand of the other "the notion of the other's decision . . . made in me" (277). This idea is different from a decision made based on "given norms" (Eagleton 153).
3. For instance, Carsten Springer, apart from persistently focusing on most of the criticism of *The New York Trilogy*, believes that a positive shift from a deconstructive postmodern phase takes place in Auster's works, especially after *Moon Palace*, and that Auster's works grow to emphasize traditional moral values like "humaneness and communication" (218) or "love, family, partnership, and friendship" (219). Springer calls such a metamorphosis in Auster's works a "reconstructive postmodern mode" (216). However, if, as Springer insists, achieving a more stable identity is regarded as reconstructive, then "reconstructive" and "deconstructive" (postmodern) would have an uneasy coexistence indeed.
4. In particular, Levinas censures Heidegger, who affirms the priority of "Being over existents," and suggests that the primacy of ontology

is to "subordinate the relation with someone, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the Being of existents, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), [and] subordinates justice to freedom" (*Totality* 45). For Levinas, to give priority to Being (existence) over existents constitutes the ontological subject based on freedom, intelligibility (knowing), or representation, because the primacy of Being allows the ego (the same) to regard the other as one of them and thus reduce her irreplaceability to generality. In such a relationship, it is always the ego (the same) that determines the other.

5. Among the small number of book-length studies on Auster, Ilana Shiloh and Carsten Springer's works approach Auster from the direction of identity. Shiloh suggests that Auster's central concern is a "quest for the self" (10), even if most characters are doomed to fail the quest. Springer also concentrates on the identity crisis as Auster's overall theme.
6. Simon Critchley, in *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, claims that with some understanding of Levinas's work, it is plausible to understand Derrida's deconstruction in a more positive way as "an ethical demand which provides a compelling account of responsibility as an affirmation of alterity" (189).
7. Alike Varvogli also connects Auster's hunger motif with his Jewish identity (71).
8. Levinas illustrates his well-known notion of *il y a* by talking about insomnia. Unlike illuminated space, nocturnal space lacks perspective: the exterior remains uncorrelated with an interior. In the darkness, "[w]hat we call the I is itself submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalized, stifled by it" (*Existence* 53). The impersonality of insomnia is the exact contrary of an unconsciousness and rather "the consciousness that it will never finish—that is, that there is no longer any way of withdrawing from the vigilance to which one is held" (*Time* 48).
9. Levinas considers lying down and sleeping "in a place" to be a way to forget and interrupt *il y a*—that is, an anonymous being left in the absence of place: "In positioning itself on a base the subject encumbered with being gathers itself together, stands up and masters all that encumbers it; its here gives to it a point of departure. A subject takes on things" (*Existence* 69).
10. This passivity is, of course, not a Levinasian passivity, which is a passivity more passive than the opposite of active. See, for example, Levinas's essay "Useless Suffering."
11. Levinas associates *il y a* with an image of the night itself; however, Effing's inability to grasp objects by sight seems to be central to the horror of *il y a*.
12. Auster's concern for the other's face also appears in "The Book of Memory" of *The Invention of Solitude*. Whenever he meets other

people, the protagonist is obsessed with their faces, causing the collapse of phenomenology. He is compelled to find out "the encroaching signs of the future: the incipient wrinkles, the later-to-be-sagging chin" (87), especially in the faces of young women. He seems to regard the face appearing in front of him as something beyond contemporaneousness, and thus feels her aging and death.

13. See Joyce Reiser Kornblatt, Gary Indiana, and Michiko Kakutani.
14. *City of Glass* begins with yes, which suggests "I-here." Quinn, a survivor who has lost his wife and son, attempts to answer the other's demand until he loses all his money, his home, and his identity. It is noteworthy that Quinn is in the toilet when he receives a phone call from Virginia Stillman "against his will" (*New York* 11). Quinn, as a mystery writer who evaluates human reason, dislikes the telephone, which suddenly rings and requires him to respond, even at inconvenient times. But Quinn cannot ignore the telephone and answers, "yes?" (*New York* 7). It is symbolic that Quinn is required to answer the phone when he must satisfy his most passive desire, which remains uncontrolled by his free will.
15. In his novels *The Invention of Solitude*, *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, *Moon Palace*, and *Mr. Vertigo*, Auster pursues his principle concern with language—namely, the possibility of telling about the other. However, his characters seem to suffer from the dilemma that narrating the other—that is, converting the other into language, the general media—can oppress the other's otherness. I suggest that Auster's question of whether narrating the other can be performed ethically is more fully answered by examining *The Locked Room* and *Leviathan*.
16. It can also be said that a few of Auster's works do not sufficiently describe the priority of the other over self. As an example, *The Music of Chance*, focusing on the protagonist's desire for freedom and self-autonomy, does not fully develop an Austerian motif that the subject responds to some demand or gift given by the other regardless of one's free will. It is not irrelevant that the novel is written in the third person.
17. In "Reality and its Shadow," Levinas shows that literature cannot be ethical because the characters of a novel are represented and captured by "the fixity of images" (10). Nonetheless, Auster's struggle to narrate the other without obliterating the other's alterity seems to embody Levinas's idea of the saying as the interruptions of the said, that is mainly discussed in *Otherwise than Being*. See Robert Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* that examines the saying occurring in literary art as well as in philosophical discourse.

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