

ENDURANCE

ENDURANCE

A NON-PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSITION

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*'Everything that borders on torment wakens the psychologist in each of us, as well as the experimenter: we want to see how far we can go in the intolerable.'*¹

(E.M. Cioran)

*'To endure life remains, when all is said, the first duty of all living beings.'*²

(Sigmund Freud)

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0.
FOREWORD

ENDURING THE BLAST FROM BEING

*'Being is essentially alien and strikes against us.'*³
(Emmanuel Levinas)

0.1.

On a hot summer afternoon in 2014, when coming out of the petrol station just in front of my former studio on Storkower Str. 118 in Berlin, I almost walked into a woman entering. I looked directly into her eyes and met an exhausted gaze that suggested a life not happy. She was perhaps in her mid-forties, but the beauty of her once-young fresh skin was gone; her face was wrinkled and reddish from alcoholic consumption, and she was dragging her body along. She was wearing old clothes, her hair was tied loosely in a knot and she had made no attempt to hide behind a mask of makeup. *Endurance*. Endurance was the word that came into my mind as I passed her. She was enduring her situation: inhabiting an ageing body, putting up with a life that seemed void of what would pass for 'quality' to others. What I saw was a body that had preserved itself until that moment, had endured the *blast* of being and was still standing erect, but to my eyes, she had passed beyond any ability for renewal, growth and expansion: she was on her way down hill, her body ageing, crumbling, slowly being drained of its powers of existence. A definitive movement towards death had begun and in the years to come it was only going to accelerate. I might be speculating, projecting my own thoughts onto her situation, but this is what I experienced that afternoon on the outskirts of Berlin.

0.1.1.

From the encounter with this woman, the concept of endurance arose, along with the sense that it deserved a non-philosophical⁴ consideration – that I, as a non-philosopher, should begin to think about it. Obviously, we as humans are able to endure, but what does that mean? Who endures in our world today? Why are pain, suffering, misery, ageing, solitude and rejection part of everyday life, as something that must be endured? Is endurance an existential trait of our human life, like being situated within a body, or projecting ourselves into the future?⁵ I think it is. Endurance should be added to that long list of features arising from the *Existential-phenomenological tradition*⁶ that encircles fundamental aspects of our existence. Through my investigation, I have come to see endurance as a concept that arises from my condition as a human being: I must endure that I am present as an organism with the *ability* to endure life. I have given myself over to life, yet life has also manifested itself through my endurance. By this I mean that my exposure to life is visible as the accumulation of time in my body: the wrinkles, the scars, the grey hair. My ageing body has been shaped by my accomplished form of existing. My ability to perceive the world is inflected by what I have seen and the specific qualifications I have acquired: the depth of my experience and my *being-ability*⁷ as the totality of my competences. I now have within my constitution a certain *psychic sensibility* and a certain *friction* to the world with which I have to *live*, because I am asserting my difference as a generic singularity, disclosing my heterogeneity as a human being that I have to endure.

0.1.2.

So, I am able to endure. But what are the limits of endurance? How much can I endure? What is my breaking point, at which I can no longer endure? To think about endurance has been a move towards the intolerableness of existence: that zone where I am confronted with the *unendurable*. Let me be clear about this: to think about endurance is a *speculative opportunity*. It is to think about my existence approaching a juncture when I will no longer be myself, when I will dissolve, become something other to myself. It is to approach a zone of existence where living a human life becomes *dread* or *depression* and where ultimately I will no longer be present to the world. This speculative dimension permeates the whole concept of endurance and my textual undertaking. Endurance has woken the psychologist as well as the experimenter within me: I have wanted to see how far I can go in the intolerable (to paraphrase Cioran). In the summations of this book, I will move into this zone, speculating on the logical endpoint of endurance: suicide. I must, however, underline the fact that I am not suicidal. I never intended to write a book about suicide, but through this conceptual event of *endurance*, suicide arose as the other side of endurance. *Endurance represents the attempt to consider the possible limits of human existence*.

0.2.

This woman whom I accidentally passed did not appear out of nowhere. Scattered around the petrol station and my previous studio were a number of buildings erected during the GDR

regime: slabs of concrete, stacked upon each other eight storeys high, plonked freestanding on the parking lots without any intimate relationship between them – typical Communist architecture designed with efficiency and anti-individualism in mind. Today, they fittingly contain the job and tax centre, accommodation for homeless people and other unknown office functions. During the two-and-a-half years I had my studio there, I saw all kinds of people who do *not* belong to the upper-middleclasses – those who pay high income tax, lead ‘good’ lives and fit neatly into society. Passing my studio windows or on the streets around the area I saw disoriented immigrants, scavengers searching for empty beer-bottles and talking to themselves, shabby young people with dogs drinking alcohol in the morning, taxi-drivers pissing behind bushes, overweight office clerks stretching their legs and smoking cigarettes. None of them seemed happy to me; all bore a sad and lifeless expression. And for a long time I have wondered: what kind of life are they living? What do they have to put up with? What are they enduring? And, given my difference from them, as someone belonging to another class, age group and nationality, I have wondered: do I share structural similarities with what they must endure? Is there a transcendental ground that our existences have in common? Thus there was a certain eerie feeling feeding into this flesh-and-blood encounter with the woman in the petrol station, a feeling arising from the numerous ‘human baths’⁸ among all these people living on the margins that I have more or less willingly taken over the last couple of years, and this led to the birth of my concept of *endurance*.

0.2.1.

This book can thus be seen as an attempt to corner an aspect of contemporary living that does not find its way into the glossy magazines, the television shows and the banquets of the rich and wealthy. It is an attempt to present the violence inherent to living as a human that I have experienced both from within (my own life as a human) and from the outside: from the mere act of observing a human situation, trying to grasp through empathy and imagination what it must mean to exist in such a body, in such a situation of despair and dread. From these reflections, I hope a better understanding of marginalised humans living on the border of society will arise; of those who suffer from being trapped within a society where capitalism rules and every human is regarded as an economic unit; of those displaced from a habitat, unable to make ends meet, engulfed in a state of misery. The number of people who are struggling under this new historical regime are many and we as a civilisation still have much to work on in order to minimise and avoid human suffering. Endurance as a concept is the demarcation of a field of experience *before* redemption: the space that a human body traverses before it is saved from a terrible situation.⁹ To some extent, the concept of endurance highlights those zones of human life that represent the *systemic neglect* of our modern world: human beings left on their own, isolated, suffering and who do not enjoy happiness. Endurance opens towards the land of depression, with its myriad entrance points and where the black hole of suicide looms on the horizon – as the ultimate end to everything to which a consciousness can bear

witness. Endurance points to a state of being, lasting months or years, that sucks joyous time out of a life that could be lived differently. Endurance points towards what is *intolerable* to a human being. We might exist within the most complex and advanced age of technology and with the highest standard of living among most people in history, but this evolutionary, technological and numerical success is little comfort for the *individual* enduring a life of misery, poverty and depression. I hope through the concept of endurance to generate a new space of social criticism based on the existential experience of being human.

0.2.2.

Endurance as a non-philosophical undertaking can be seen as a new way of considering *estrangement* (Marx) within our contemporary world dominated by the hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism. I admit that I have completely internalised the neo-liberal requirement of taking responsibility for my own career and life within the ‘competitive state’,¹⁰ and I am therefore the only one to blame for my own feelings of failure and burn-out, of not being satisfied or believing that I am not doing well enough in my career. But I must also acknowledge that the experiences of alienation and exhaustion that haunt me and the feelings of absurdity that engulf me come from the structural conditions produced by the society in which I am living. What is this world that I live in? Is it a good world? I look out and I see that there are still many who live under terrible conditions, not to mention the rising number of young and middle-class people who are struck down by depression. Well aware that I am running the risk of being designated a ‘bad’ neo-liberal subject because I am exploring the negative consequences of the current dominating social order upon me as a psychological subject, I question whether we are on the right track as a society. What I mean is: the current formation of neo-liberalism has a negative impact on both my social and psychological well-being.¹¹ Not all humans thrive in a world that values the pursuit of self-interest, control-management, accumulation of private wealth and the constant acceleration of all processes – from education systems to work flows, social media and transportation.¹²

0.2.3.

Endurance can from this perspective be viewed as a state of being for those alienated by the space of post-history in which they live; I know what the good life should look like and what it should contain, and yet the good life has not yet come to me. I endure my situation, because I am a body that is able to endure stress, economic insecurity and feelings of burn-out. Post-history here does not mean that we no longer exist in history, or that historical events no longer happen. It means that we live in a time defined by the fact that one aspect of man’s existence has been institutionally accomplished and secured through the space of democracy and human rights, thus representing one possible telos of history: the movement towards the modern nation-state as we know it. In post-history, another non-evolutionary space appears: man-as-animal in all his flesh, wrapped in skin and nerves, sustaining an anonymous force of life within himself.¹³

0.3.

In *Generic Singularity* (2014) I wrote: ‘Own being is a form with a specific power to receive and endure *the given*.’¹⁴ And: ‘Whatever body we see is a body that has endured time, preserved itself until *now*.’¹⁵ I was, then, already aware of endurance: that the given must be endured. It was an aspect of my thought-space, but it was with the encounter at the petrol station that I realised *endurance* could be elevated to a concept in itself. The moment I started to think about endurance, it began to multiply itself and became an *event*¹⁶ in my thinking. Through the concept, I have learnt to see the world of human existence from a new perspective: what is a human being enduring? What offers itself up on a daily basis to be endured? How much can a human being endure before he or she gives up, crumbles and breaks down or even voluntarily opts for suicide? So many aspects of endurance have appeared since that encounter, and slowly a body of thought has emerged, gravitating towards various themes and aspects, each traversing the dimensions of own being (the body-self), given being (the social-world) and final being (time-death) in several ways.¹⁷ The components I have decided to single out reveal a magnetic attraction to certain aspects, but do not have a set position within the flow of the analysis. For example, I have placed the aspect of *ageing* within the section titled Enduring Time-Death: Final Being (temporality) because it designates a sense of accumulated time within the body, but one could also claim that it manifests itself in own being: that my ageing is present within my body as the wrinkles in my skin or my grey hair, or as the form of my self and the being-abilities I have acquired. This applies to most of the different aspects of endurance that I cover in this thought-space of a book. The truth is that no aspect of the *metaphysical knot*¹⁸ exists independently, since all are interwoven, interlaced and tied together.

0.3.1.

Endurance is the result of this private investigation, a multiplication of a concept that to my knowledge is yet to achieve philosophical status.¹⁹ Henri Bergson’s (1859–1941) concept of *Durée* posits the idea of duration as ‘immanent to the universe’: there is a duration in time that allows the evolution of objects, relations and environments to emerge.²⁰ Duration is a temporal trait of organic life: existence displays itself across a temporal continuum, but only through the constant absorption of energy and spatial negotiation within an environment. Energy is transformed and duration arises as the expression of a life-force (the *élan vital*) permeating the organic unit and thus allowing for an inner continuity between states of transformation. *Endurance*, on the other hand, points towards a more complex human situation where there is a self-awareness regarding my bodily capacity and the knowledge that I must exist within a space of consequences. *Endurance* is the conceptual voyage towards the dark side of duration, because it confronts itself with *existence-in-time* as dread. It is not a concept about time, but the outlook of a consciousness sensing that a life on a singular level has ‘gone wrong’.

0.3.2.

By describing a certain way of existing in the world, I am writing the most depressing book possible for me: the book that most clearly testifies to my *depressive realism*.²¹ It is a vision of the world as it is, of what I must be ready to encounter, not to mention what I have already experienced (writing now in a moment in time when I am looking back at states of being from my youth, my formative years and recent experiences). It shares its dark, moody and introverted atmosphere with the writings of E.M. Cioran (1911–1995). I fully understand and admire his pessimism regarding the human condition – the honesty and clarity with which he dismantles every possible illusion. With this textual undertaking, I have also tried to confront the depressive facts of human life. I want to write a book that reveals a state of being with which I am familiar in order to outline a position from which to see the world. In short, I wish to describe endurance as the opposite of ecstatic joy, where I am able to endure that which is at the border of the unendurable, of what I can *no longer endure*. Later, I want to write about its counterpart: *the spaces of ecstasy* to which we humans also have access. Ecstasy here means joy, affirmation and the life-enhancing forces that lift me up, give me power and access to excesses in a multitude of ways, from the joy of looking into the eyes of a smiling child to the pleasure of viewing a magnificent sunset, to the happiness that comes from working on something common, to the pride derived from achieving a goal or helping others, to the physicality of being active with my body through sports, work or sex.

0.3.3.

Another point of reference to which I have kept returning while writing *Endurance* is the short but highly condensed text *De l'existence a l'existant* (1947) by Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), a book written during a period of captivity in a Nazi concentration camp between 1940–45. One senses the distress of the author, being pushed to the limit of his own human existence, enduring a daily battle against violence, hunger and meaningless death. In this book Levinas confronts Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) idea of *Being* with the concept of 'Il y a' – 'There is', which is a name for a being without beings.²² As I see it – and this is how I will use it – the *there is* designates a space of anonymous darkness, where a human being is reduced to his or her material existence as a naked being, but without any recourse to ontological security within the ontic.²³ The *there is* is that state of being where a body-self is 'flooded by being'; thus it is a position where one loses oneself, where a situation becomes unendurable. For me, the 'there is' reveals the possibility of a grey zone in human existence, where I am approaching the limits of what I can endure towards their possible transgression; where I am forced into something other than myself: losing control, overwhelmed by nausea, almost exploding from the inside.

0.4.

The thoughts presented here are non-philosophical in the sense that I have thought them within what I am capable of thinking.²⁴ For me, the act of non-philosophy is the gesture whereby

I try to conquer the world from within the flesh into which I am embedded. '*I am the absolute source*',²⁵ as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) famously stated about the phenomenological endeavour of trying to recapture and reawaken the basic experience of the world from a particular point of view. '*We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determining and expressing in concrete form this phenomenology for ourselves.*'²⁶ This 'phenomenology for ourselves' is what Merleau-Ponty later designates as non-philosophy: the individual interpretation and transformation of philosophical insight into a life to be lived and thus a displacement, not only of any kind of pure scientific thinking, but also the reflexive subject thinking thoughts. The individuality of experience that generates my non-philosophy returns to my existence as new ways of seeing and feeling. In this light, my thoughts derive their meaning from what I have experienced, how I have endured being alive with a certain tendency towards *expressive nakedness*, again and again attempting an existential sovereignty towards myself in the act of communication, coming as close as possible to an ultimate vulnerability.²⁷ I have tried to be as honest as possible about the way I exist, entering into this thought-space from the depths of my own experience, admitting that I have had – and from time to time still have – negative feelings in my life that drag me down and diminish my existence (Spinoza). I am aware that other experiences of existence are endured *beyond* what I have endured: that of losing a child, getting divorced or fired from a job, being imprisoned, a fugitive, a political refugee or homeless, existing in a concentration camp, drafted into war, suffering from cancer, paralysed from the neck down, diagnosed with Alzheimers, raped and tortured. The list of human disasters, misfortunes, accidents and horrors – of what is being endured right now by the totality of humanity and what might await me – is long, and the suffering continues to pile itself on top of the already existing heap of what must be endured. Nonetheless, in my own existence, there has been a sense of enduring, and from this experience, however limited, I will draw what I am capable of thinking. I need no certainty that what I write is scientifically 'true'. What I have is the inclination towards thinking (contemplation as creative production) and a desire to think my life as something that can be thought upon a plane of immanence²⁸ delineated by the dimensions of own, given and final being.

0.4.1.

It is important to understand that my non-philosophy is based on the assumption that we as humans are constituted by three transcendental conditions: the body, the social and time (the metaphysical knot).²⁹ Merleau-Ponty expressed these conditions as follows: '*It is a fact that I believe myself to be first of all surrounded by my body, involved in the world, situated here and now.*'³⁰ Together, these dimensions constitute a field of forces that in each life form a totality, but manifest themselves differently depending on the nature and number of the aspects feeding into each dimension. Each human being can account for the body in which he exists, the social world in which he is embedded and the time to which he belongs; each has a multi-

faceted experience of what it means to be human. The metaphysical knot constitutes a plane of immanence upon which a varied number of phenomena can appear, existing side by side as aspects of enduring either the body, the social or time. These dimensions manifest themselves in their contingency within each human life. They each have different components giving flesh to their manifestation and to how they manifest themselves to me as a particular entity. The fundamental dimensions can be seen as a triple hypostasis of what a human life will always be. Each human being participates in these transcendental principles, yet also distorts and expresses them in his own specific way. These dimensions do not exist as pure entities in and of themselves. For me, as a non-philosopher, they express a principle of parsimony: like a razor they slice out a framework of the body, the social and temporality that *can* be thought in every circumstance (Ockham). Own, given and final being are dimensions of human existence that in real life co-exist and within this intertwined web of dimensions human experiences arise as events that can be reflected upon – the experiences that I myself have generated and experienced from within, and then those experiences where, through imagination, I allow myself to think myself-as-another; experiences where I travel beyond myself into what I think or sense through empathy when confronted with the face of another.³¹ Naturally, there is never a clear-cut division between my singularity and the world of others, yet there will always be something special about the experiences I have had myself. It is here that non-philosophy begins – the act of pushing personal experience into the abstract space of reasoning.

0.4.2.

Thus, I am a non-philosopher in the sense that I take as a baseline *my* experience of life and how *I* see life come into being through these dimensions. The analysis I will carry forth is thus non-philosophical because it has as a point of departure *the depth of experience* that is present within *me*.³² Of course, my non-philosophy and the propositions I present here are marked by what I have been able to extract from existing philosophy in relation to the concept of endurance – yet through my always displaced and limited understanding. I am not a master-thinker; rather the opposite, I think for myself as a visual artist in a personal manner, moving between the worlds of philosophy, psychology and sociology through my non-scientific propositions. I am *off-grid* in relation to any academic institution and beyond any economic relations regarding position, salary or honorary possibilities. This does not mean that I am not acquainted with scientific discourse and how it proceeds and is verified and contested by the institutions supporting it. By ‘off-grid’ I simply mean that no one asks me or pays me to think. I don’t need to apply for commissions or ask for grants in order to think. I am not part of a research team and have no institutional framework supporting me. I am not – and I don’t think I am able to become – a subject with a scientific habitus. I think because I have the *inclination* to think. Thoughts simply think themselves within me and I have reached a point where I have seen the necessity for thinking them through to their conclusions. At this moment in time, I feel the need to think this thought-space of endurance. *Endurance is a topical event*³³ in my life – it has been written out of a necessity: as a way for me to produce a conceptual space

that is equivalent to my current situation in life and the challenges I have experienced – and in some instances still experience – on a daily basis. And on a further level, it testifies to an inner temptation to think my life beyond living it, a thinking that has made me shudder as if awakening from a nightmare; a zone where I can no longer judge what is most tempting: to be alive or to be dead.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. ENDURING THE ABILITY TO ENDURE

*'We cannot elude existence by explanations, we can only endure it.'*²³⁴
(E.M. Cioran)

1.1.1.

The question raised by the concept of endurance is first and foremost: What is the relation between the power to exist, the power to resist and the limit of endurance? This forms the nucleus of endurance – it delineates a horizon in which the concept becomes operative. What is my ability to endure my own powers of existence? What is my ability to resist that which must be endured? And finally, what or where are the limits of endurance: my breaking point? The first two questions point towards my powers of preservation and resistance as a formatted body-self amidst the violence of being; the latter points to my breaking point: that threshold where I can no longer endure the violence of being as it gives itself to me. My power of preservation is my ability to have relations with the world; my power of resistance is the extent to which I can endure through the form of my body as a physical condition and a totality of being-abilities in relation to an environment. The limits of my endurance are where I break apart through physical violence, illness, stress, social failure, ageing, depression and ultimately suicide.

1.1.2.

I, as a body-self, exist with a being-ability that I must endure. I must endure the fact that I am this 'existent' (Levinas) with an ability to exist in being. I must endure the inescapable facts:

my body, my social world and my being in time. I have to endure what these fields of forces *do to me*. I am within a metaphysical knot of relations to these basic dimensions that impose themselves upon me simultaneously and, in a certain sense, pull me into their realm and make me a site for the inscription of their forces. On the other hand, it is through the mastering of these relations to the dimensions of being that I am able to preserve myself as a human being: actually being able to live a life. I must endure the fact that the metaphysical knot is empty: there is a 'nothing' inside me, no universal point of safety where I am protected from the *play of existence*. Yet at this moment of writing (2017) I have developed relations so I can survive them: I have constructed a framework of relations that I am able to endure. I am capable of living life at this moment simply because part of the social matrix from which I have originated has initiated and formatted me into an order of life. I was given a degree 1 of given being that made it possible for me to establish a degree 2 of given being: a world where a life is possible.³⁵ My given being today is a totality of both degrees within my existence. I am now an expression of this totality: my past declares itself through my present. My movement through life has been the continuous accumulation of being-abilities that in a trial-and-error fashion explored the quality and intensity of my relations to the world. In a constant loop of feedback and response I have come to realise what I am good at and through which means I can support myself as a human being. I must endure what has been given to me through my talents and the ways in which I have cared for them.

1.1.3.

I endure life because I am a system of powers that enable me to receive being, but I must also produce myself as a biological and social being: I must breathe, drink, eat, sleep, urinate, defecate, make a living through working in a socially constituted space, protect and care for my children, comply to a generalised space of conduct and behaviour towards the worlds in which I am present. I have acted so many times in the past in order to arrive at my present, and I will have to act in the future in order to maintain it. I have relations to being, but having these relations comes at a price: I have to endure the relations in order to live off them. And 'relations' here means the distribution of rationalities directed towards these dimensions: how I have intentions, but also prioritise and legitimise my decisions and actions within own, given and final being, so that my life becomes liveable and meaningful. I am a system (a body-self) with a power of endurance that allows me to get through life. Within me as a bio-system there is a force of life, a desire for life, a natural ability to live in this current eco-system. I cannot consciously make my heart stop beating; it will pump so long as the basic conditions are in place: oxygen, nutrition, water, safety, warmth ... So I must *stand* it. *Take* it. *Face* it. Standing, taking and facing reveal my ability to endure the world in whatever expression it takes – the 'it' pointing towards the totality: the violence of being or what is generally referred to as 'life'. One way or the other, we are all enduring the ability to endure. In short: *I endure, therefore I am.*

1.1.4.

Each living organism has a resistance immanent to its constitution. For example, I can endure weather conditions in many places on the globe; I can endure a huge variety of nutritional matter; I can endure a multitude of social situations without breaking apart. My present physical condition comes with a *resilience* against the context in which I am present. This in-itself represents a resource enabling me to exist. This resilience can be challenged and become insufficient the moment I am present in a different geographical environment or another social situation. For example, I do not have the physical requirements to climb Mount Everest or hike across the Greenlandic icecap. In both instances of hostile geographical circumstances I would become dependent on different materials: special clothing; oxygen at a certain altitude; a snow-scooter to cross certain passages. And then there are instances of social terror, such as being held hostage and subjected to physical and psychological torture. What would be my limit? How much pain, humiliation, starvation or isolation would I be able to endure as a body-self before I surrendered? I simply do not know, because I have no experience of such instances. But I know there is a limit to my being.

1.2. THE DECISION: LIVING IN THE SPACE OF CONSEQUENCES

*'To endure the consequences of their actions, or to be saved from them – such is the lot of men.'*³⁶
(E.M. Cioran)

1.2.1.

My decisions are the prison I have built around myself: I have to endure the choices I have made in my life. And I endure this decision-space I have erected around myself because it is a *space I want*.³⁷ The relations I am unfolding I unfold because I want them. Today, my will is actually there. *'Existing involves a relationship by which the existent makes a contract with existence.'*³⁸ (Levinas). My contract with existence manifests itself through the decisions I have made: I endure in a space of consequences arising from all the decisions I have made until now. For example, I have chosen to become an artist and thus opted for a *precarious* socio-economic existence.³⁹ I must endure this decision: each day in my studio, I must put myself to work, enter into a dialogue about my work, secure future exhibitions and commissions, make sure materials and inspiration are there. I must endure the economic insecurity, sense of isolation and depression that seem to accompany this life. I am not paid by the hour, but have monthly costs like everyone else. My socio-economic precariousness is the price I pay to follow my passion for art and artistic freedom: the freedom to choose the content of my life.

1.2.2.

To be an artist was *my* choice; to work as a painter was also *my* choice. My choices represent my degree 2 of given being. I exist within that framework of choices to which I have committed myself and the ways in which I have committed and continue to commit myself to my decisions. What has become my being is produced within a field of decisions, yet these decisions were made possible *by the specific way in which being was given to me*. My decisions were made against a background of a degree 1 of given being. My grandfather was a painter; I grew up among paintings; I was good at drawing as a child; I kept on drawing at university and down the road people kept saying: *'You have artistic talent; you're really good at drawing; maybe you should paint!'* So, my choice was not random: it happened in a complex field of immanent talents (and their continuous manifestation) and external expectations from those surrounding me. Around this initial choice of becoming an artist there are choices that add to the framework of my life-world: that of marrying; having three children with my wife; sustaining life in Berlin for eight years – and now in Denmark. These are the coordinates of my daily life, the matrix that nourishes me, gives me the drive and power to exist. Yet for all my powers to *do something in this world*, I still have to live with my choices. My decisions represent the fact that in order to produce being I am also *subjected* to being, a subjection to being that in the early grey mornings produces an inner exhaustion. Or, in the words of Levinas: *'There exists a weariness that is a weariness of everything and everyone, and above all a weariness of oneself.'*⁴⁰ I am trapped within this specific configuration of obligations, demands and expectations that by their sheer weight can make me crumble.

1.2.3.

Through my initial decision to become an artist, I crossed the space of angst: the revelation of being as openness that I had to confront but also surpass. Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) stated it as follows: *'Angst is the reality of freedom as the possibility of possibility.'*⁴¹ Angst is a mode of existence that is different from *fear*, which has a specific object; angst reveals the fundamental openness of *my* existence; as a human being I am given over to the possibility of making a *choice* of what to become. To have a life is to exist within openness, yet every openness is always local and specific to each individual, thus making angst a mode of existence related to the decision. A choice taken by another is not valid for me, because my circumstances are different. So *my* angst arises when situated in a maze of directions to take, all choices possible for me, yet I do not know what to choose or what I want to become. This radical non-knowledge regarding the future manifestation of my existence is materialised angst. It is angst *within* me as the hovering of nothingness, a draught from a black void. It is the infinity of time projecting itself onto the present as infinite possibility.

1.2.4.

Today, as an adult of 39 years of age, my angst is eclipsed by a different kind of doubt and uncertainty closer to that of *fear* than 20 years ago, when my sense was simply insecurity about

who I was, what I wanted and what I could achieve. Now that I am established as a painter, have accumulated a body of work, have exhibited and lived off my artistic practice and have become known in a cultural field as a painter of architectural spaces, my fear is about my will power: Do I have the energy to keep going to the end? Do I have what it takes to make another *push*, another attempt to break through and realise my ambitions? Do I have the resources within me to overcome yet another defeat? How long can I endure this inner sense of failure? I am afraid, yet I cannot exist in the state of fear forever; I must destroy my fear by *taking* and *making* the decision to keep moving forwards with my work. Taking the decision is the construction of the necessary rational reasons for why I must act: building the argument. Making the decision is to carry it out: to organise it on a practical level, confronting myself with the social and being prepared to live with the consequences. By making the decision I am transforming it into an *energy-field* that makes me operative. The decision gives me energy because it makes me fly above the present. My decision is directed towards the future (Heidegger).⁴² On a mental level I have left the present. A new life is awaiting me: myself-as-another in a different life-matrix. Through my decision I am 'futuring' myself. The decision cuts through my life and opens up a new horizon of uncertainties. I make the decision, but I still have to endure the *space of doubt* that follows from this decision. To doubt is to allow uncertainty to become real in the form of the constant self-questioning of what I am about to embark upon. My doubt is the suspense between different possibilities, not always equally valid, yet mutually exclusive. Could 'the good life' be not a state of being but a path that arises through the continuous act of deciding what is right and good *for* me?

1.2.5.

I am enduring my life, because this is what gives itself to me on a daily level. My present being is given to me, like the measurement of an earthquake in a retrograde manner. My previous decisions inform how the given manifests itself, not as a constant crashing into my life of unforeseen events, but as the *arising* of events that are expected on a daily basis. The vital decisions happened many years ago, displacing and shattering me, but also engaging me to that life that is now mine. I am living in the aftermath of the earthquakes of my earlier life and still making new decisions that will give my life a new direction again. The facts remain: I am 39 years old and I have painted for 12 years. I have traversed canvas after canvas, often haunted by doubt and dread. Did I do the right thing? In order to find out, I have to endure. I endure the time it takes to allow my decisions to manifest themselves, and I am able to endure this because I have the power to resist being: I am an existent capable of resisting the power of death (Bichat).⁴³ I endure life because I want to, but also because I am expected to. But what happens when I give up, when I can no longer resist this call from death, when I choose to kill myself because what life has to offer does not supersede what I must endure? Such a self-killing of a life takes place because life has become unendurable for an enduring being.

1.3. THE PAST AS PRESENT TENSE: THE DAILY WEAR

*'What do you do from morning to night? – I endure myself.'*⁴⁴

(E.M. Cioran)

1.3.1.

Looking back at my life I see what I have endured. I have preserved myself, maintained some kind of form that allows me to be this being right now. Right now I am embedded in the *everyday of a life-world* to which I am configured. The daily life is the preservation of what I have become as a human, because throughout life I have wanted to survive *this* life as a painter and a father of three children. I endure it because I have a will to ecstasy: the ability to be soaked in the joy and happiness of saturated consciousness. Yet the everyday is also the daily wear upon my body and my relations to being. I feel, in the evening, the *exhaustion* after a long day of hard work and parenting as the strong desire to relax and sleep. And over the years, this daily wearing down of my energy resources is also a lessening of my energy (Lacan).⁴⁵ In short: my powers to preserve myself in what has become *my* reality are slowly diminishing. My strength is not the same as it used to be, and the time and energy needed to train myself to a better condition takes longer and is much harder to obtain. From a physiological point of view, I am on my way down hill and have been for many years.

1.3.2.

This life until now has been a great 'push' into the world: reproducing myself with offspring and presenting myself as a social and bodily life-form, going out into the world, making a living, eating food, sleeping, getting up, repeating and differentiating myself in one seemingly endless cycle of repetition and alterations: a cycle of days eclipsing darkness; mornings becoming afternoons; evenings of going to bed, sleeping and waking up. I remember myself as a small child, when what was to become my future was unknown *to me*; and now I think back, let my thoughts wander to those moments in time when everything was still open, my body young and fresh. My present age belonged to 'old people'. I look back now and realise that from now on and until death, I will have to endure that slow inevitable entropy of my body: I am losing bodily energy on many levels. I am enduring all the signs of old age: grey hair, wrinkles, the black bags beneath my eyes, the tiredness in my body, the allocation to a new temporal plane of existence (middle-age). I am enduring an eclipse of my physical power by younger generations. I am overtaken, pushed down by their energy. They can run faster than me, beat me when we play football, exposing my weakness.

1.3.3.

I endure the past as present tense, because I am enduring the history of my will: what I am, I once decided upon. I am present right now with a *tension*: the tension of my will, wanting

to exist in the world in this form, as this artist-being who thinks as a non-philosopher, a will that manifested itself long ago in the past, yet is still present within me. I still want to achieve as much as I did 20 years ago. This is what gives the present its tension: it is infused with a desire that has travelled through time. I am a time-capsule; within me resides a vast stockpile of experiences, memories, ambitions and being-abilities, which have accumulated to a point that designates *my* singularity. I am the one. Right now. How long I will keep going, being able to live this form, I do not know. It is perhaps this uncertainty of the future and a fear that it will all end in disaster that gives rise to a resistance against the thought of enduring the future. I no longer want the totality of the future for what it might bring me. I know, however good, it will also be accompanied by misery, sadness and grief. Instead, I begin to long for the past, for the state of being where my body was young, fresh, full of potential and hope.

1.3.3.1.

My ability to endure is exposed to the *wear* of enduring the primary levels of bodily existence. On top come mental states of being: I endure my solitude, my feelings of depression and my speculations on the end of my life. I live, and throughout this living I have been enduring the *pressure* of being alive in the midst of a violent being, imposing itself upon me. I breathe, I pulsate, I am hungry, I have thirst, I feel cold, I sweat. This material flesh of mine, this sensate being, I must endure because it is the only one I have, in all its being, both ecstatic and miserable. I must – and I have – learnt to live with it: to protect myself from the violence of being through the governing orders of rationalities. I am embedded in the mediating structure of a self that distributes my way of being in a world that is organised on another systemic level. I am present to the year 2017, which is a world away from life in 1917. Our human world is constantly evolving and whatever is left of humanity in 2117, it will certainly be different from our present situation.

1.3.3.2.

I have learnt to accept that I will not experience continuous bliss. For me, as a living organism, there will be moments of joy, inner peace and satisfaction, and in between there will be hardship and weariness. I doubt I will ever be able to leave those states of melancholia⁴⁶ and feelings of failure behind. They are part of me; they co-constitute the emotional landscape of myself. When I attempt to remember myself, they are the shadows hovering at the periphery of the illuminated image of my past.

1.3.4.

A human being exists, which means it is being worn down, exhausted and abraded like a machine. It is worn down by the generalised violence of being. Life imposes itself upon me as wear and tear. I drink, smoke or work myself to death. I have to endure this wearing down. I can take this wearing down up to a certain point. My body is a point of resistance: I have power to endure the given in this present moment, but I have also started to feel a limit

to my body. I don't heal and recover as fast as I used to. I learn to live and accept this slow *de-composition* of my being because my being has a material output in this world: it leaves a trace. I can see the result of my efforts in the world. There is evidence of my actions to which I can return; artefacts to which I have access (through my archive) and for which I can be honoured. My artistic output has the potential to become a monument that will outlive me: a monument that has the enduring powers to preserve itself through time. Depending on what I have decided upon, my life will have a very different material output.

1.3.4.1.

In the beginning it can be just a simple line, but over time the totality of actions accumulates and becomes 'something', because through my sign-making I am *carving* out a niche for myself. In my niche, in that space that suits me and my talents, I can make being run faster, because it is a channel that I chiselled out myself: I am the one who has become a master of these specific means of expression. Yet this mastering, which is both a pruning of my being-ability and an intensification of my being, is also a limitation. I cannot do everything else as well, or put differently: most other things I do will be mediocre, average and without excellence. My mastering gives me a power to exist, but I am also wearing myself down, because I am giving myself fully to *one* aspect of *my* existence. To achieve something, I can't do everything. We can say that time is *eating* me through the duration of my existence, but I am also *beating* time by producing new flesh (my children) and works that will outlive me.

1.3.5.

While I was waiting for the pedestrian light to turn green, I noticed an elderly man at my right. He was wearing leathers, his shoulder-length hair was grey, and he had a hunched back. He was puffing away on a cigarette. The lights turned green and he stumbled across the road, obviously in pain. I saw his body, and I felt the weight of time as a heavy load coming down upon him. Like another Atlas, he seemed to be carrying the weight of the world. I had a sense that he had lived: going out to parties, drinking, taking drugs, being excessive. Yet now he was paying the price. His body and organs were worn out. He no longer had access to that space of ecstasy: the youthful body able to dance all night that could exist in a space of eroticism and expanded consciousness created through the consumption of alcohol and drugs. As a body-thing that had transgressed the borders of being and entered into heterogeneity, he had given everything. Now he was almost a nothing: a weakened crumbled body. For me, he expressed what wearing down literally *means*.

1. 4. FIRST SUMMATION: NO ONE GETS AWAY ALIVE

*'The certitude that there is no salvation is a form of salvation, in fact it is salvation. Starting from here, we might organise our own life as well as construct a philosophy of history: the insoluble as solution, as the only way out.'*⁴⁷

(E.M. Cioran)

1.4.1.

Endurance as a concept opens up three paths that lead to a thought space. First, endurance points towards my bodily constitution as an organism capable of existing in time and space, with the power to receive but also to produce being. My body-self has a limit to what it can endure, a threshold where it will break apart – either physically as in an accident, or psychologically as in a nervous breakdown or suicide where it self-destructs. In all these instances, an existent is no longer able to endure. As an *own being* I am enduring my ability to endure. Secondly, endurance points towards living in a space of consequences: as an adult I exist within a degree 2 of given being where what gives itself is the result of choices I have made earlier in my life upon a degree 1 of given being. In order to live life I must endure that space I have decided upon. It is my decisions that have pushed me this far into life, constructing the coordinates of my daily life, informing how the given gives itself. Not that I was able to decide on everything, but the sense of a direction and the primary content of my life comes back to choices I have made.⁴⁸ The totality of my *given being* I must endure as a space of consequences. Thirdly, endurance points towards the fact that my organism, existing as this power living in a space of consequences, is exposed to *wear* in time. I am slowly being worn down by the sole act of living within a space of relations to own, given and final being. My endurance points towards this insistence on being this human being confronted with the generalised decomposition of my body. Not now, but 30 years from now, my middle-aged healthy body will be eclipsed by a worn-down wrinkled body statistically ready for the grave. Entering into life I received the possibility of living, of having this one life to live in time; yet from my first breath, my death was announced: *no one gets away from life alive*. I must endure that I am a *finite being*; that I am temporal and through the temporalising of myself I am being worn down.

1.4.2.

The text in the following sections moves through the dimensions of being that constitute the metaphysical knot: own, given and final being. In order for a human life to be possible, the body, the social and time must all be endured. The components feeding into these dimensions are, of course, limited to *my* experience of life. They point to *negative* aspects of living, to zones where life becomes limited and reduced by dread. I write from my position in life and this writing has a value for me – however limited it might be. Every experience there is positioned within a spectrum – there are always other people for whom life is worse, more

terrible or catastrophic. And yes, many more forms of experiences could be added. For example, a refugee who has survived crossing the Mediterranean but has lost his wife and two children on the voyage would be able to write a completely different account of endurance than mine. *The phenomenological content of enduring life is not the same: the given gives itself as a phenomenon differently according to our situation in life and the powers of resistance we have against the violence of being.*

1.4.3.

The underlying questions of this book are: How much can I endure? What is my breaking point? When can I no longer *exist* in the given? When can I no longer *resist* the given? At what point will I give up my given being and surrender own being to final being? I want to consider aspects of endurance where I could reach a breaking point, where my existence is brought into play, where I change, destruct or ultimately end my life in suicide. I will be investigating these liminal zones with which I have been in more or less intimate contact even though they are not universal phenomena, *but I cannot account for the totality of human life endured.* The components I am about to describe through a phenomenological sketch are all in their own way difficult to endure: they represent the hardship of a life that when endured over time will wear me down. Some of the aspects described are related to the ability to endure (the body as a system of needs, pain and illness), others to the space of consequences (such as rejection, poverty and stress) and then aspects related to daily wear (ageing, isolation and physical labour). When I have toiled with these aspects for many years, I believe I will be done for, worn down, ready for the worms.

ENDURING THE BODY-SELF: OWN BEING

*'Being me involves a bond with oneself, an impossibility of undoing oneself. [...] The enchainment to oneself is the impossibility of getting rid of oneself.'*⁴⁹
(Levinas).

*'Bodily existence which runs through me, yet does so independently of me, is only the barest raw material of a genuine presence in the world. Yet at least it provides the possibility of such a presence, and establishes our first consonance with the world. I may very well take myself away from the human world and set aside personal existence, but only to rediscover in my body the same power, this time unnamed, by which I am condemned to being.'*⁵⁰
(Merleau-Ponty)

2.01.

My body is a dimension of my life: it is the special object to which I am always present. It condemns me, not to freedom, but to enduring life in whatever form it might take. I, as a self-consciousness, am unable to escape my body as a body-thing. I cannot exist as a chair, a rock or a bird. I am trapped, yet not as in a cage. My body is not a prison, but a monument of flesh that I am struggling to keep erect as a functional human being. I am incarnated into this object that is a double-sided being: it is flesh, blood and bones, vital organs and surface skin and yet I have consciousness of myself as a structured self with a history formatted to a world where life *for me* is possible. My self as a structure mediates between all the impulses from within my *monstrous body*⁵¹ and the behaviour appropriate to the situation.

2.02.

My body is a special object: it forces me to have relations with the world depending on my position in time – a position that changes throughout time because my body is organic, developing from a minuscule foetus inside my mother's womb to my present situation, right now as a mature body slowly ageing towards an old body. My body was once something different: it was smaller, fragile, a child's body. Now it belongs to a grown-up man, an individual inscribed in a social space in a historical moment of time. I am *accomplished* as a social being, but within me are still the remnants of powers originating in my childhood: my body is an expressive entity. I can modulate it as an instrument. I can dance, sing, scream, shout, cry, laugh, giggle and whisper. In a split second I can change my bodily output, become something other to myself and my surroundings. Throughout me a raw being is dammed up, waiting to be unleashed upon the right signal. This seldom happens, because as a dimension, my body is kept in order by the mediating structure of my self: that order immanent to my body that enables me to become functional in this world, *allows* me to have a world, because the self is the condition of my social and reflexive capabilities. Without my self as an order there would not be a body (this body) allowed to exist in this way in time. I would have been locked up, placed in a mental institution or killed because of a heedless action. My self is developed in social space in a dialectical fashion against and with my body as the ground for my being. For example, imagine what kind of self you would have been had you been born with a genetic defect, received too little oxygen during birth, leading to brain damage, or survived a serious accident but left paralysed from the neck down. Your bodily self-experience would in each circumstance be different, and so would your self-consciousness.

2.03.

This monstrous body of mine is an organism that as a power can resist the given: the totality of pressure that is exercised upon it. Thus I survive as I have done up until now. I have kept my body alive in one continuous movement since my childhood: I was not dead between the ages of 23 and 33 and then suddenly woke up to continue my life. I am still alive and have been throughout my life for 39 years. This body of mine has become something specific: a body tuned to a certain way of engaging with life. I have 'made' it 'mine' through my life. My body came into the world as a small lump of flesh and inside of it 'I' began to emerge simultaneously with my bodily growth into time. *I have taken time* and *I have been given time*. Today, I am enduring the degree 2 of given being: I am enduring the choices I made in life with what was given to me as *conditions* to live a life.

2.04.

I am a human existence that has become capable of enduring being at this particular moment in time. I am fit for this world. My existence now comes with a certain *being-ability*: the pragmatic ability to exist in this world as a functional unit. My being-ability is understood as the possibilities that will unfold my being in the world. I can read and write, communicate

in several languages and am skilled with my hands; I am educated, I have travelled, I have knowledge of certain aspects of how our contemporary world works. All these are vital elements of my own being as the form through which I can endure the given. I am this body doing this thing with my life: living out the generic space of being an artist. On a daily basis I exist within this specific space that often goes unnoticed, because after so many years I am used to it; it has become a habit for me. I have internalised and mastered those necessary self-technologies (Foucault) that allow me to survive in this space of being simultaneously an independent entrepreneur, creative worker and producer of special objects. Yet for all my individuality, my own being is structurally equivalent to all other humans in the Western world: a monstrous body governed by a mediating structure of the self.

2.05.

Throughout this section, the components that have entered onto the horizon as aspects to think about are those that have pointed towards the limits of *my* endurance as an enduring being. For how long can I keep preserving this body of mine, repeating myself as I do? Under what intensity of violent conditions could I exist? Where is my breaking point regarding pain and illness? Ugliness and deformity? The number of traumatic events I can surpass? The amount of physical work I can do? These aspects could lead to a nervous breakdown, a depressive burn-out,⁵² force me to commit suicide. I don't know what the exact limit of my endurance is: I try to avoid these limits, because these limits designate my own annihilation. '*I am still alive, ain't I?*', Philip Guston remarked when walking through his last retrospective of paintings a couple of months before his life abruptly ended, as if it was remarkable that he still was alive, not having succumbed to suicide as his father did when Guston was ten years old. We are all living, each carrying on in our own way in a life that is an experience to be endured. Life has its beautiful moments, but only because I endure those spaces of melancholia, exhaustion and hard work in between. I endure being, with all its alienating powers striking against me (Levinas), because I am able to do it and because life is worth it.

2.1. PRESERVATION AS REPETITION: A SYSTEM OF NEEDS

*'But to live is to blind ourselves to our own dimensions.'*⁵³

(E.M. Cioran)

2.1.1.

I endure this body as a *system of needs*: it breathes, it exhales, it is thirsty, it is hungry and it has a temperature that must be kept constant. I am forced to endure the internal pressure from my body to expel its waste products: it must defecate, urinate, fart, sweat, spit... I must go

to that toilet and get rid of waste from my intestines, day in and day out until I am dead. And I must eat and drink: fill my body with energy, proteins, carbohydrates, fatty acids, minerals, vitamins, liquids in all kinds of forms: water, juices, milk, coffee, tea, wine, sodas and alcoholic drinks. Food comes as a multitude of possibilities, all entering through the mouth and then coming out through the penis and the rectum. I must endure the fact that I am an organism that needs to take energy from my surroundings: *a bio-thing*; not a rock or a man-made object, but an existent that has evolved within the overall setting of *nature*, that global environment to which I belong as the species *homo sapiens*, an erect mammal with two legs and two arms equipped with an oversized frontal cortex. Like all organic beings, I am dependent on the environment in which I live: the correct amount of oxygen in the air; access to water and nutrition that I can digest, and a secure, private space in which to sleep and protect myself from destruction. I defend myself from the environment behind a pragmatic veil: I wear the clothes that are suitable for the weather conditions; not too little so that I freeze, not too much so that I overheat.

2.1.2.

A scene from the science-fiction film *The Matrix* (1999) has been haunting me. Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, enters for the first time into cyberspace as an agent. An infinite line of machineguns, firearms and war accessories appears in a white boundless space, from which he must select his weapons. What has been haunting me is not an idea of myself as Neo fighting a war against other secret agents, but the image of the endless guns, which I equate with the infinitely repeating actions in my life. I see myself waking up each morning; I see myself sitting on the toilet thousands of times; I see all the occasions on which I have brushed my teeth before going to bed; I see myself repeatedly riding a bike. What I see is all the daily actions I have to do in order to preserve myself, and most of them are repetitions, beginning with the simple act of breathing and extending to the chores that I must do every day. Even though each day does not consist of the exact same actions, for the most part, my life consists of repetitions. It is those very simple repetitions that enable me to live: that I never stop breathing; that I eat and drink every day; that I sleep and wake up every day. And then come the actions that are added on to my biological system of needs: that I must take care of my children, go to my studio and work, wash my clothes, clean my house, play sports etc.

2.1.2.1.

When I am in this mode, I look at other human beings of all ages and I try to imagine how many times they have been to the toilet; I try to envision all the plates of food they have eaten during their lives; all the times they have undressed and gone to bed; all the times they have opened the front door and gone out into the world. An old body is a body that has sustained itself day after day until this present moment; a body that has survived until now, preserved itself on many levels of being without committing suicide or dying from accidents or illnesses. Age is another name for the extended attempt to keep death at bay through preserving a system of needs.

2.1.3.

The basic act of repetition comes from my biological origin: the preservation of my body consists of habits that are defined as patterns of behaviours that repeat themselves to the point where I am no longer aware of them. I cannot remember all the times I have done these actions listed above, only that I *must have done them in order to arrive at my present situation*. If I were to see them all I would be blinded (Cioran). I am reminded of this constant over-writing of the past or self-forgetfulness when I flick through the pages of the small book registering my use of the sports hall where I play badminton every week. I see the dates, the union name, the time frame and my signature over and over again, page after page, for more than five years each Tuesday, doing the same thing again and again. I can not differentiate between these singular actions; what is left is the trace of my signature, my few recollections of playing badminton, and the acquired being-ability that comes from training: that I am now a fairly skilled badminton player. And this is the point about preservation through repetition: that through the constant repetition of an action I acquire my being-ability. I have arrived at my present form as a being because I have repeated myself to the point where I have *automated* myself. This automation is possible because my body-self is a system: what enters and leaves does so through very specific channels. Our system is capable of survival because it has reduced the complexity of the outside world to a basic operation: all organic energy to be consumed enters through the top and all waste products through the two holes at the bottom.

2.2. PAIN AND ILLNESS

*'Misery constitutes the texture of all that breathes.'*⁵⁴

(E.M. Cioran)

*'There is a pain in Being.'*⁵⁵

(Emmanuel Levinas)

2.2.1.

I know pain on different levels within my body, from the physical act of being bruised by stepping on a stone, tripping on a doorstep or falling off my bike, to the act of cutting myself on a knife or pinching my own skin. Here, pain is transported through my nerves. There is a direct cause and effect between the surrounding world and the feeling of pain in my body. I know the cause: either I bumped into the world of objects and hard surfaces, an object sliced open my skin, or I inflicted the pain with my own body. And then there is the pain of illness, stomach ache, headache, the feeling of nausea. Sometimes I understand why my body hurts, at other times I do not really know. Have I slept badly, become dehydrated, exposed myself to toxic chemicals or eaten something I could not digest? My pain in these circumstances is surrounded by a sense of uncertainty; the cause-and-effect relation is not clear to me. None-

theless, I still sense this pain within me, since my body is that object that delineates my psychic limits, my threshold of *pain* that I must endure on a physiological level. The person next to me, who has cancer, multiple sclerosis or a broken leg is also in pain, but his pain does not enter into my body. I can *feel* it empathetically and to some extent internalise it, reproduce it within my own body as a knot in my stomach; yet, the intensity of pain cannot be transmitted. My body is protected by my skin and the millions of nerves connecting every little inch of it to the centre of my brain, informing me whenever something is happening on my body-surface.

2.2.2.

During illness I become that body in fever, in pain, engulfed in a tiredness that robs me of my healthy, positive, upbeat way of existing in the world. I am dragged down towards an inner *dispersion*⁵⁶ of my being: I lose the ability to think straight and I become dark, sad and introverted. I simply look and feel *displaced* from my healthy body.

2.2.2.1.

Illnesses come in every form imaginable, and however they manifest themselves – whether they last for a long time or only a couple of days; whether they go away by themselves or I need to be hospitalised – a common feature is that they *pull* me away from the world. My illness disperses me, because it reduces my being. I am there, but not a complete self with all my powers of existence. I am there, but as flesh wrapped in skin, sitting in a chair, lying in a bed. I must endure this illness as a temporal duration; the negation and denial of *me* as a healthy entity. My illness corners me; it places me in a specific relation to those who depend on me, and on those on whom I depend. To those to whom I am responsible I must cancel my obligations and let them know that now I am ill and I will not be able to do this or that. I must visit the doctor, let her examine my monstrous body and explain my symptoms and prognosis: the beginning, development and expected duration of my illness. Once I have been diagnosed with an illness, I cannot decide *not* to be ill, and I must follow the directions of my doctors and accept the duration of the illness. In short: I must endure the fact that I am ill for so many days, weeks, months or years. If I am diagnosed with a fatal illness, I will have to endure it until death. To be diagnosed ‘terminally ill’ is forever to be *severed* from the primary ecstasy of a healthy body.

2.2.3.

Illness and its accompanying pain vary in scale and nature. Is it temporary, fatal or hereditary? My sense of the illness depends on which category it belongs to. If I was born with it, it will naturalise itself to the point of becoming a given of 1 degree, something that I have never been able to escape or avoid. Thus I can only learn to live with it, accept it, forget it – and in that maze of hindrance it puts upon my life, I must learn to search and appreciate those moments where I am not limited by it. If a fatal illness is suddenly diagnosed, it will crash upon me like lightning, striking me to the ground, forcing me to confront my finitude

in a whole new way. The diagnosis of a lethal sickness is like the pronouncement of a death sentence.

2.2.4.

And then there are the illnesses and accidents for which I myself am responsible: if I smoke cigarettes, work with toxic materials without using proper safety equipment or ride a bike without a helmet, then I am to blame, because my illness or injury is self-inflicted. Not only must I endure the pain, but also my own stupidity for acting against existing knowledge and risks assessments. Bio-politics in our modern age have attempted to reduce the number of illnesses and accidents caused by individuals themselves or structures of behaviour generating illnesses: by banning cigarettes in public spaces and through taxation; through safety regulations at work and public campaigns for safe driving. The state as the expression of public will is nudging its citizens towards more rational, less expensive actions and thereby reducing accidents and illnesses in public and private space.⁵⁷

2.2.5.

I endure the suffering from illness to a certain point. I can keep on suffering for years, because I can endure pain within the space of the endurable (with the help of pain killers and modern medical care). When I am ill I suffer from the sheer presence of being: the violent attack on my sensory system that my illness is to me. Other illnesses such as paralysis could break me apart to the point where I actually want to die. Here, euthanasia becomes a consideration, because a life has reached a point where it can no longer be endured. A human being wants to die because he or she cannot go on living and no medical redemption is in sight. Modern medical technology can sustain a body that has been destroyed, yet what is the quality of such a life?

2.3. UGLINESS AND DEFORMITY

*‘The man who is very ugly in appearance . . . is not very likely to be happy.’*⁵⁸
(Aristotle)

2.3.1.

In every culture there is an ‘average person’, a huge concentration of ‘similar instances’ within a population of people who on an individual level have their differences, but taken as a group display a certain ‘form-likeness’. I call this average group, idealised into an image of the ‘natural body’, a ‘norm-form’. Deformity is measured as the distance from this partly statistical, partly imaginary ‘middle’. How far away am I from the expected norm-form by which my bodily being is categorised? For example, if a ten-year-old boy is 1.8m tall, he will

be considered an anomaly, because the average height for this age-group is only 1.3m. Being overweight in a context where everyone else is slim will also be considered an anomaly, but in some instances obesity is so widespread that it has become its own norm. As I see it, the *monstrous body* exists within a *spectrum* of possible instantiations and covers all kinds of instances generated from birth: from the genetic recombination of human chromosomes, to chemical interference with the foetus during pregnancy, to the instances generated through life-style: the body pushed to its extreme form through either overeating or malnutrition. We have the average 'healthy' body and around its fringes we have irregular instances in relation to the norm-form. And these irregular instances have huge variations, from the scarred body to the paralysed body; from the body with skin disease to the body with deformations.

2.3.2.

So, whatever my distance, depending on the nature of my deformity, I must *endure* this deformity. I must learn to live with it. For example, when entering into puberty I realised that I had *pectus excavatum*, also known as 'chicken breast' – a cavity in my chest. I kept away from beaches and situations of public nudity where others would display their muscular appearance, because I felt *deformed* in relation to their 'perfect' bodies. In my teenage years my slight deformity made me sexually insecure. It was *felt* and internalised in relation to a norm of the perfect body that I did not live up to. My deformity was measured as the distance between my real body and the ideal body.

2.3.2.1.

During my late teens and early twenties, my face became home to thousands of pimples. *Acne vulgaris* is the name given to these small volcanoes that cover the face, dripping blood or healing into crusts, leaving scars. They attract the attention of others like blinding lights. You notice people looking at your bad skin. Their eyes flicker. You fill their soul with horror. Having bad skin is not something you wake up with one morning. It begins slowly, grows on you, and then one day people start to talk about it. '*Have you noticed the change?*' You are confronted with it; it becomes a public issue. You struggle against it, see the doctor, take medicine. You might be unlucky: the medicine does not work, it will not go away. It becomes a condition. You are filled with anger. Frustration. I fought it for years until I eventually got the right medication and time did its job.

2.3.2.

My skin deformation left traces: scars. I still have them, these small crevices on the side of my face. The discolouration has disappeared now, years later, but not the memories of the pain. When I see other people with bad skin, I see this inner pain and frustration. I see all the times they have looked into the mirror, slipping their fingers over their rippled skin and accusing their own body of inflicting this on them. *Why me?* I look at them, and I sense all the times they have been rejected from the space of the erotic.

2.3.3.

Being ugly in the eyes of others can inform my sense of who I am. I know my 'face-value': whether I am regarded as beautiful, attractive, sexy, or ugly, boring and unpleasant. This 'face-value' – or the lack of it – either enhances or diminishes my self-reliance. To exist as this irregularity pushes me into a corner as a human being, as he who stands out negatively, incarnating a lack of being, that of beauty.

2.3.4.

There are certain instantiations of the deformed body that make me want to vomit: the overtly obese body and the skinny anorexic body. Both extreme instances create within me a sense of the unendurable. To imagine existing within such bodies evokes within me a state of being that I cannot contain. In both extreme positions I cannot *exist* within this body-space. I am either swallowed by the flood of fat or suffocated from the lack of flesh. I attempt to imagine *what it would be like* to exist within such a body, but my imagination will not do it.

2.3.5.

I sit in the train and opposite me a woman my age looks out of the window. She has a tired expression, a melancholic gaze enhanced by grey eyes with dark rings below. Her nose is oversized and slightly reddish. I notice her mouth. She was born with a harelip, which was operated on many years ago. The cosmetic surgery has made it better, but has not made her facial deformity disappear. It inflects her breathing. Her clothing is nothing special – not new or flashy, and in beige washed-out colours. She is not wearing any makeup and her haircut is simple. I look into her eyes, trying to read her soul. What is going on in her mind? What is she thinking? What has she been thinking for many years? From my external knowledge, what I can see, I sense a certain feeling of loneliness and bodily displacement. She is alive, existent, but she never signed that contract with being – that she was going to be the one with the facial deformation. She was born with it. She was given over to life, but with a flaw. She never chose it, but still had to endure it. And in the long run, not only has she been forced to endure her ugliness, but also the consequences of this deformity: of speaking strangely, the difficulty of finding a partner and maybe even a job, of being rejected in the erotic space. Is she angry? I sense a damming up of pain and anger against *life in general* – of being forced to endure being instead of enjoying being.

2.4. TRAUMATISATION: THE TRACE OF VIOLENT ENERGY

*'One absolute experience, apropos of anything, and you seem, in your own eyes, a survivor.'*⁵⁹
(E.M. Cioran)

2.4.1.

A trauma is the trace of violent energy. A trauma is violent energy absorbed by tissue, leaving a sign revealing an organism's level of strength and elasticity. Depending on what crashes down and who receives the blow, the trauma manifests itself differently. A body might still be alive, but the experience has left a trace. Whatever the trauma, a traumatised consciousness has survived the experience. The traumatising of my existence depends on my form: how much am I able to endure at a given moment? To suffer trauma is to be inflicted by an event that cannot be mastered by my form. For example, as a child it can be traumatising to be left alone for hours one evening, but for a teenager it is no problem. To fall from a 5-metre height will not have the same impact on the body of a sixty-year-old as that of a ten-year-old because they have different constitutions, muscles and bones. In both instances, the nature of the event is similar in its objective form, but the form of the two individuals is not the same. Thus the trauma depends on which body-self is experiencing it. The power of the event to traumatise is not the same, depending on how much an individual can endure. Have I tried it many times or is it the first time? Was I able during the terrifying event to *act* or was I *locked* in a situation, unable to do anything?

2.4.1.1.

Being is essentially alien and has the ability to strike against us (Levinas). Against the violence of being we protect ourselves with a shield of rationalities. All our conducts, conventions and rules for behaviour are forms through which we minimise the friction between humans in social space. We might adhere to social systems, but not everyone does. When I experience sudden aggression or the unpleasant behaviour of strangers (an attack, theft, sexual abuse, rape, attempted murder etc.) I can become traumatised when their violent energy enters into my body. My body is not a mountain, made of rock, standing solid on the ground; my body is elastic, vulnerable, precarious and consists of soft tissue that stands little chance against the violent blasts from being. Traumatism can be seen as the event where something harder than me rips my body apart.

2.4.2.

The trauma is the experience that overwhelms me to the point where, as a body-self, I am inflicted by so many wounds that I 'shut down' (repress), go completely numb, stiff and wordless, unable to utter a word. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the name given to a condition where the blast from being has been so overwhelming that the body-self can no

longer continue to exist in its previous form. PTSD is often seen in soldiers returning from war zones or people who survive violent accidents. Here, the event leaves such a massive scar within the mind that it constantly returns in the form of nightmares or as the fear of closed doors, for example. The disorder arises because the traumatising event is like an earthquake that continues to send shockwaves through the organism.

2.4.2.1.

Not only am I exposed to the violent assault of the event, but in the case of PTSD the event returns in my consciousness and becomes a nightmare. This is the stress aspect of traumatising: that the event becomes an uncanny guest within me, haunting my consciousness like a ghost with the power to alter my personality. I am sleep-deprived from being woken up at night by the terror returning – and from the lack of sleep, I decompose. What the event has left is perceptual configurations that can appear out of nowhere, not only in dreams: a noise that triggers the memory of screaming; the angst of powerlessness; the fear of death. Here, the body-self is forced to endure something in the past that keeps returning, to the point where it destroys a being in the world. To be exposed to a trauma of such magnitude can become unendurable: it is the flooding of a consciousness where any escape seems impossible. This is why there is a higher risk of suicide among people diagnosed with PTSD. They cannot endure the constant flooding of their being by the trauma. They are crushed by the violence, pushed into a zone of the unendurable. Their mental constitution is destroyed.

2.4.3.

Traumatism is when the scar is so deep that it will not disappear; when it leaves a trace so immense that the body cannot heal completely. The violence entering into the tissue becomes the trace of a *pheno-event*, an event that was unforeseen and non-planned. Something beyond me entered into my body-zone and perforated me, altered my course, sent me to the hospital into the hands of doctors and carers. After the trauma I am the survivor (Cioran), the one who had to endure the trauma upon my soul. I become the witness to the accident, he who must narrate the event to the other and live *with* it.

2.5. PHYSICAL LABOUR: DIRTY HANDS, HUNCHED BACK, LIMPING

*'Physical suffering in all its degrees entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence. It is the very irremissibility of being. The content of suffering merges with the impossibility of detaching oneself from suffering.'*⁶⁰

(Emmanuel Levinas)

2.5.1.

A mature adult body enters into the zone of work to make a living. Different physical acts of delivering a task wear a body down differently: do I work as a labourer, pushing and unloading heavy containers every day, or do I sit in a office in front of a computer screen? Did I begin work as a scaffolder at 20, or did I take up a teaching position when I was 30?

2.5.2.

One's work is almost always visible in the hands and how the skin feels when saying hello: is the handshake strong or gentle, the skin's surface rough or soft? Has the hand been used for lifting heavy things, touching uneven materials or to browse through paper, to tap on a computer keyboard? Thereafter one starts to notice the physicality of the body: How are the muscles distributed? Is the body compact, energetic, asserting itself with a strong posture? Or is it slim, slightly wavering and with a hunched back arising from hours of sitting at a desk? Or is it overweight from too much junk food, too much sitting still? Is it limping from overwork, accidents or operations gone wrong?

2.5.3.

I can discern from the appearance of a body how it has been physically active in work. And here, I do not mean physically active in the gym, but how it has exposed itself to physical labour. The act of physical labour wears down a body in many ways and a body will at some point become abraded and unable to work: the sheer pain from aching muscles will make it unendurable. In some instances osteoarthritis attacks the body that has been working physically hard during a long life. The pain reveals a body that has put itself between the world and objects in a motion that has over time inflamed the tissue between the joints and the flesh.

2.5.4.

Even though it is an accomplishment of *systemic modernity*⁶¹ to have eliminated a huge number of physically hard activities in the Western world, we still have many jobs that cannot be taken over by machines or robots. To perform these tasks is to enter into a zone where the body must counteract the resistance of the object with its own energy. I am thinking here of jobs such as moving furniture, bricklaying, doing renovation, putting up scaffolding, cleaning, foresting, making roads, digging pipelines or working as a butcher. But professional athletes

and elite sportsmen will also at a certain point be worn down by pushing their bodies into the zone of top performance. Here, the excessive activity coupled with a high level of expectations wears down the body-self.

2.5.5.

In the beginning, my young body discloses itself as source of energy: I can work all day and continue the next day; I can sleep for a few hours and get up early in the morning. The older I become, the more my powers of regeneration diminish; the wear upon my body leaves a greater impact and I cannot keep going as I used to. I feel the slow disintegration of my body as a reduction of my physical powers. The inflammation of my muscles will not go away, the pain within my body becomes permanent. Once I have matured, I slowly move towards a state of constant fatigue. Within me is a memory of what I was once capable of: of running that extra mile, lifting so many boxes, hitting the ball that hard.

2.5.6.

Physical labour most often makes the hands dirty. To be dirty is to be in contact with the materiality of the world: from earth, to grain and gravel, to rough surfaces and heavy objects; from dirty water to blood and meat. Everywhere, physical labour makes the hands dirty – and wise.⁶² A different knowledge is embedded in physical labour, because through the daily contact with the materiality and resistance of the world I come to know it from within. My body accumulates a knowledge of the objects and how they interact with my intentions. I know how to work them, but the price I pay is the traces they leave upon my body. I exchange the tissue of my body with a material knowledge of the world.

2.5.7.

The last thing I do after finishing my work in the studio is to clean my hands. They are stained, smeared with paint and toxic liquids. I use a special creamy soap that I press out of a tube. I rub my hands and dry them with an old cloth. I must then wash my hands in water and ordinary soap before they are completely clean. The whole process takes about five minutes. I know my materials are poisonous. I have a sense that they will be my death sentence: that I will die from cancer. If I get that diagnosis, I will have to endure living with an illness originating from a lifetime of working with dirty hands.

 ENDURING THE SOCIAL-WORLD: GIVEN BEING

*'According to Hegel, man will be completely free only "by surrounding himself with a world entirely created by himself." But this is precisely what he has done, and man has never been so enchained, so much a slave as now.'*⁶³

(E.M. Cioran)

*'The world is the given.'*⁶⁴

(Emmanuel Levinas)

3.01.

My life-world is like a monad surrounded by a vast number of other life-worlds, each constituted through its primary members and those who adhere to it; each with daily trajectories into the world to perform certain tasks: a job, an appearance at an institution, a presence to a public world. Cutting across, extending beyond, going into each life-world is *systemic modernity*, which as a conceptual armature binds all those life-worlds together through a contract of justice, belief in human rights, private property and scientific reason, the right to accumulate wealth, to educate oneself, to speak freely and the right to gather as a group. Systemic modernity is the violence of *my* given being (not that of a nomad living in the Sahara desert); it is a historical construct that has only recently manifested itself, containing within its own ideological structure ideas and aspirations that are centuries old. It is now sedimented into architecture and spaces containing the defining institutions of the society in which we live. It cannot just be taken down, broken apart, dismantled. It will keep on existing because it has

become abstract: manifesting ideas regarding human freedom, dignity and recognition. Systemic modernity is a spirit present on many levels and with various degrees of intensity and loyalty depending on the position of the individual in question (for example the difference between a public prosecutor and a criminal). In whatever form we attempt to understand systemic modernity, it is there as a democratic-capitalistic order intertwined with a number of larger worlds: the nation state, the media, the welfare state, the spaces of higher education, the world of law and order, the established city structures with their vast networks of transportation on the ground, in the air and on water. And more recently, from a historical perspective, telecommunications are now surrounding the world with satellites in orbit in outer space and fibre-optics in the earth. Each instantiation of systemic modernity is constituted through its territory (the extension of its geo-political borders) and its legal participants (those who hold national citizenship).

3.02.

Systemic modernity is a protecting order that preserves a certain rationalisation of life at this historical moment in time (2017); outside it (and partly also inside it) there are humans who do not adhere to systemic modernity, or who wish to belong to it but are not allowed (refugees and migrants), or who do belong to it but want to destroy it (radical terrorists). Systemic modernity does not exist in an equilibrium; it has no perfected state of being, but is always on the verge of restating itself as an idea and institution. We, its users but also its performers, are constantly forced to question this formation, because it represents a violence in itself. Systemic modernity is a shield that we have constructed to reduce human suffering, misery and catastrophe, but also to generate wealth, freedom, knowledge and exploitation of natural resources for our own ends. It is the 'safest' mode of social organisation, but only because it is founded on such a high degree of violence coupled with a immense *readiness for violence*. Systemic modernity has the ultimate weapons at its disposal and will unleash forces of destruction against anybody who comes up against it.

3.03.

I, the citizen, must endure the absolutism of systemic modernity and its current formation, governed by a neo-liberal ideology that privileges the wealth accumulation of those who already have wealth, and sees the state as a competitive entity. I must endure the fact that my existence does not fulfil the expectations of this neo-liberal regime; that I am a 'bad neo-liberal subject' because I do not have a 'normal' job with high earnings. I must endure the fact that currently, for me, there is no other world order outside of this attempted self-justified 'utopia'. I might disagree, argue against, adjust, correct it, but I cannot do anything against its basic core values. I can build a 'small' world inside systemic modernity, but I cannot escape it unless I deliberately move to another part of the globe. I will have to exile myself in order to escape it.

3.04.

My given being is doubled by both my life-world and the existence of systemic modernity. I am given over to my life-world right now: my wife, our three children, our apartment, my studio, the institutions where I deliver and pick up my children, the shops where I buy our food, the roads I traverse on a daily basis. My life-world is my reality, yet it is infused with the accomplishments of systemic modernity: from the electricity powering our appliances, to the medical knowledge that encourages us to brush our teeth and to eat healthy food, to the use of internet and media technologies. I am living in this space a life that is mine. I endure this social world because I have qualified myself through it, but I must also endure the fact that systemic modernity transforms me into an economic unit with a value. I endure systemic modernity because it is my origin. I 'belong' to it, but this doesn't mean that I cannot criticise or be sceptical about it. I have the highest degree of freedom within this sedimented institutional structure to do *what I want*, just so long as I do not harm others or destroy myself. And because I am part of this system, performing it on a daily basis as a totality of generic spaces in different contexts, I also have the power to alter, change and re-direct the efforts and distributions of relations within systemic modernity.

3.05.

As mentioned in the foreword, endurance as a concept 'corners' aspects of contemporary existence that must be endured and that to a certain extent represent 'systemic neglect'. By this I mean that even though systemic modernity is an accomplished state-organisation apparatus that infiltrates all aspects of our lives, it still has a long way to go before all human misery becomes history. In this section, I will thus explore certain social categories of inter-human relationships that have found their way into my space of thinking: not being recognised, social failure and silence, exile and estrangement, social isolation, poverty and, finally, burdensomeness. Many human beings traverse these social categories, some more than others, yet they all point towards aspects of a living that must be endured. They are aspects of our common world, but they could be reduced through systemic alterations: poverty through a different distribution of wealth, education and social welfare; social isolation through a different distribution and organisation of human spaces and relations; exile and estrangement through a different distribution of culture, openness and political recognition.

3.1. NON-RECOGNITION

*'Experiences of contempt are accompanied by affects that reveal to the individual that he is being denied social recognition.'*⁶⁵

(Axel Honneth)

3.1.1.

Recognition of the individual as a free person is one of the key aspects of democracy in systemic modernity. To be recognised is to be granted citizenship within the armature of the state; it is to have rights such as the right to vote and access to social welfare, justice and protection against violence. It is the right to accumulate wealth, to own property and to access information in a free way. As a historical accomplishment, the nation-state-democracy formation is based on a fundamental recognition of its individuals, according them with dignity, value and worth. I am either born into the state if one of my parents belongs to it, or I can apply for citizenship and then enter into it. Those who have citizenship are recognised by the state and the national community, but this does not include all people who are present within the territory of the state. Illegal immigrants, political refugees, Roma people and foreigners with visas exist within the geo-political borders of the state, yet are not recognised as its legal citizens. Thus they do not have access to the same rights and services of the state and they cannot participate on the same level regarding state politics.

3.1.1.1.

If I as an individual am not recognised by the state I will be living in the shadows, fearing expulsion from the state territory and discrimination from the national people. Here, I am non-recognised because I have no proper legal status. My lack of recognition produces a denial of my humanity: I am not as worthy a human subject as those who are within the nation-state territory. Not being recognised by the state reduces me to a 'naked life': someone who is denied juridical rights and the ability to pursue the 'good life' through legal means (Agamben).⁶⁶

3.1.2.

A state apparatus is one kind of social organisation that can deny recognition to individuals; other important social differentiations producing non-recognition or discrimination are sex, race, religion, economic conditions, culture, social class and nationality. Non-recognition manifests itself here as arrogance and hatred towards an aspect of my identity that can belong to either my degree 1 or 2 of given being. For example, I can decide to become a Muslim, a Buddhist or relocate to America and apply for American citizenship. These decisions are mine. But I did not choose my skin colour, my sex or the culture in which I was born. These latter instances are my degree 1 of given being, from which I have embarked on my life.

3.1.3.

Even if I have been granted formal freedom by the state and am recognised as a citizen, there is a third kind of non-recognition that I might endure: I might be living in the shadow of other people. Then, I am enduring the fact that my existence can never measure up to the great deeds of this special other that casts a shadow – sometimes invisible – over my life. In this instance, I must endure the fact that I am ranked lower in the hierarchy, that I do not have the same leverage or power, or that I do not receive the same level of attention. I am enduring the fact that my existence is being dwarfed by the success of this other to whom I stand in relation. In these instances, I must endure symbolic castration. Over and over again I am denied the affirmation and recognition of my existence, because this special other is always doing better, is 'bigger' and more famous than me. My worth as a human is dwarfed because I am benchmarked against this special other. I feel I am living in the shadow of another *more* real self than mine. I experience the destruction of my self (of my desire to be myself), because my self is bogged down, diminished and denounced in the presence of this special other. I feel ignored. I am kept away, denied visibility within the space of reality, not recognised for what I am. It is an *affective experience* of feeling worthless (Honneth).

3.1.3.1.

Between I who am denied recognition and he who has the power to grant me recognition but does not give it, there is a dialectic (Hegel).⁶⁷ I exist in the space of the rejected, and one possible way out is to *fight* for recognition. I know that I will not receive it unless I do something different. I am forced to produce something new, something that will make my 'master' change his view of me. Until that moment when his consciousness is changed, I exist in a space of non-recognition and silence. I must endure how the hierarchy imposes itself upon me: I am situated in a stratification of the social where I am at the bottom. And even if I do work for recognition, I have no security that my work will be honoured, that I will be allowed to enter into the space of recognition. I have to endure this uncertainty, this fundamental doubt regarding the outcome of my efforts. I might work until my last breath, and yet never change anything. What if my labour is fruitless? I cannot know.

3.2. REJECTION, SILENCE AND FAILURE

'We are ourselves only through the sum of our failures.'⁶⁸

(E.M. Cioran)

'The only way to endure one disaster after the next is to love the very idea of disaster: if we succeed, there are no further surprises; we are superior to whatever occurs; we are invincible victims.'⁶⁹

(E.M. Cioran)

3.2.1.

I am rejected if I am not used by the social; 'not being used' here means not being invited to do anything; never being offered a job, or invited to exhibit my work; when my actions are never honoured, praised or even recognised with a simple 'thank you'. I am rejected from a social system if I am constantly silenced, never allowed to become visible in the sphere of power. To endure rejection is to experience the destruction of my social being. A rejection is when I am fired from my job; when a loved one says she does not love me anymore; when I am the only one not invited to join; when my application is ignored or judged uninteresting.

3.2.2.

Each rejection is a social defeat. Rejections can lead to sorrow and depression; they can repeat themselves to such an extent that I come to expect them. Then I no longer have any confidence in myself as a worthy person. I am literally useless (a feeling that often feeds suicide). I am enduring the rejection of my *own being*: the rejection of who *I am* within a given being: a being that gives itself but to which I am denied access. And on another level, my given being is also rejected: my point of origination, that being I already have been and accomplished. The foreground and the background of my existence are rejected: my past and present are rejected. Being rejected means I am denied access to a time of being-with. I am summoned to a space of solitude, a sense of failure and to a *silence*: my voice is not heard, my application is not accepted, I am not visible and I am not mentioned.

3.2.3.

In the space of rejection I am *castrated* by the social, because I am not recognised. Symbolically I am denied my being and this denial makes me impotent – in the eyes of others and in the eyes of myself. Double castration. I then have to endure this pervasive state of powerlessness.

3.2.4.

Fourteen years ago I read and memorised the following quotation from George Orwell (1903–1950): '*Viewed from the inside, life is just a chain of failures.*' That sentence stayed with me because even then it expressed something true about the individual who attempts so

much and yet feels he has only failed. He might be something in the eyes of others (Orwell, for example, was an accomplished and recognised author of novels and essays), yet from the inside of his own perspective he only feels a sense of failure. Perhaps his father wanted him to become something else. Maybe a critic preferred a different kind of writing. His publisher possibly wanted something more commercial. Maybe ... the projections and expectations that attack us from all sides are overwhelming and powerful. They at once guide us towards our potential and become our judges, by which the outcome of our activities is measured. Even though I have tried my best, I am still a failure in the eyes of those who projected so many aspirations onto my existence, because I never became what *they* wanted me to be. I did hundreds of other things, accomplished so much, yet it was never *enough*.

3.2.5.

My sense of failure I must endure until the moment I can turn it into something successful. Until then, I am just the man who failed, who became an embarrassment to himself, his family and friends; a failure in the eyes of all those who *expected* so much – including myself.

3.2.6.

As an artist I belong to the new creative (under)class: the precarious social class that exists without any real security, living from hand to mouth, always uncertain when the next source of income will arise on the horizon. I am living off my ability to generate ideas, to express myself, to make applications for grants and production support. The day this springing forth of creative energy is gone – I am done. Then I will have to forget all my attempts to become known and recognised as an artist and writer. I will appear to the social space as someone who once had potential but now is just the real of his own real self. Nothing about me will be imaginary anymore. I will not be able to become that desired projection of ambition, hope, wealth, fame or honour. I will have slipped back into the space of homogeneity: 'just' an 'ordinary' citizen unable to achieve heterogeneity to the point of recognition. And that will be my ultimate failure: that in the attempt to transgress homogeneity, to reveal my difference as a heterogeneity, I failed. And the consequence of my failure will be the poverty in which I will have to live and the confrontation with the disappointment of others. My failure will be that I have taken myself and my offspring as hostages in this attempt to live as an artist.

3.2.7.

When I am no longer here, some might feel inclined to list my accomplishments, yet the whole truth about me will have to encompass the *longer* list of failures. Are we not only the sum of all our failures (Cioran)? Our failures reveal a truth about us that overshadows our accomplishments, since in our failures we find the real struggle to exist and the full scope of our most grandiose desires: of what we really wanted. Our successes were easy, but our failures revealed a limitation that we did not master and had to accept as a defeat, not only in the eyes of others, but also in that *internal gaze of ambition* from where I judge myself.

3.2.8.

My feeling of failure arises within me whenever I am asked ‘*What’s in the pipeline?*’, a question that does not ask about my past accomplishments, but is solely about what is on my future horizon. The pipeline designates my future exhibition prospects and thus represents the extent of the social system’s investment in me. The pipeline is the totality of the projects on which I am currently working and the projects I am working *towards*. It is the events that are awaiting me, and their nature reveals my status, position and value within the system. If I have no projects, assignments, invitations, exhibitions or significant events awaiting me – well, then I am nothing. My failure is that my future is ‘dead time’: that nobody wants my visibility, and my being-ability is not worthy or usable. I am a nothing and my time can be wasted.

3.2.9.

My inner sense of failure depends on the social context in which this question is asked, because any sense of failure can only be in relation to a system of measurements. I am always measured against a social world and its internal values and accomplishments. In one context I might be the hero, the recognised artist, and in other contexts I am just a minor artist – the one of no importance. Yet I know from within what the absolute system is, and because of this knowledge I can never escape my sense of failure – I can merely try to avoid social situations where my wound opens and I begin to bleed.

3.2.10.

I count up all the rejections I have received from social spaces, the total number of applications denied and invitations not returned. I shudder from this terror, from this fact that I have not lived out my total potential. So many opportunities to become something different in the eyes of others and myself never materialised and I am left with this heap of applications that are stored away in my archive, testifying to the sad truth that I *attempted* so much, but *realised* so little.

3.2.11.

The sense of being a failure, rejected from the social, silenced and ignored by other people, can become a risk factor in relation to the act of suicide because the sense of not belonging to a social world and daily enduring the contempt and denigration of other people can be so devastatingly painful that it becomes unendurable. The author and philosopher Jean Amery (1912–1978) has in *On Suicide* (1973) attempted to think suicide from this interior perspective. Amery introduces the concept of the *échec*, which he defines as failure or defeat. It is the sense of a total disaster, of completely ruining one’s own life, and thus it is always looming on the horizon as the possibility of becoming a disaster concerning our position and status in society. It is the irreversibility of total ruin, the understanding that it is always possible to lose everything, to throw everything away. And because we will all die in the end (our natural *échec*) the possibility of voluntary death (suicide) becomes ‘*a promise full of potential*’ accord-

ing to Amery. Thus – and this is why Amery is often seen as an apologist for suicide – the act of suicide is the privilege of a human because it gives *dignity* to the subject. It is a choice, when faced with an unbearable situation (social failure, illness, denial of freedom) that the individual makes. ‘*Voluntary death* exists [...] *as an answer to échec, as an objection against life.*’⁷⁰ Confronted with the *échec*, the failure, a limit to what can and will be endured has been reached – and transgressed.

3.3. EXILE AND ESTRANGEMENT

*‘Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.’*⁷¹

(Edward Said)

3.3.1.

Exile is fundamentally a dislocation and displacement of my existence in relation to my origin. Exile is my status as a foreigner within an environment, because I am not at home. I am situated in a context in which I do not belong and might even feel unsafe, depending on my reasons for exile. Did I leave my homeland voluntarily or was I forced to? Did I seek adventure with no return in mind, or have I left temporarily? Am I escaping a war-zone, living in a refugee-camp or have I made it into a safe nation? In a circumstance where my return has become impossible, my misery is monumental: I am dammed to a life that I cannot escape. I endure the world as a human being, yet I am estranged from it because it does not belong to me (Said). In exile, I cannot participate from the same position as those who originate from the culture. I am a stranger. I have a different gaze and I do not adhere completely to all the values of my surroundings. In exile I am embodied heterogeneity.

3.3.2.

Exile is a state of being that is related to estrangement and territorial dislocation. In the circumstances where I am able to return to my home country I experience my exile with the uncanny gaze of a stranger: I know this country, I want to be part of it, but I am at a distance. I lie awake at night in a hotel room, feeling excluded. Haunted by insomnia. Where do I belong? Nobody wants the total me. They only want a part of me. I feel condemned to a state of being in between worlds, oscillating back and forth, always with the hope of finally finding peace, a space of settlement. I am estranged internally and externally.

3.3.3.

In exile I endure being a stranger to a culture, and I endure being displaced from my origin: 'Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past.'⁷² (Said).

3.3.4.

I sit in a school meeting concerning the well-being of my eldest son. Around me are all the other parents, chatting away in German. I understand parts of what they are talking about, but sometimes an accent obscures the transparency of what is being said and I am lost in that maze of incomprehensible chatter. I want to enter into the conversation as I would if what had been said had been in my mother tongue, but I can only sit there silently, focusing on what is being said, trying to grasp the meaning, and secretly hoping that nobody will ask me any questions. I cannot speak because I have not mastered *their* language, and I am thus denied access to that ecstatic joy of being *within* language, when I speak without having to consider correct grammatical order and pronunciation. In my head I try to put sentences together, but the words fall apart because I am uncertain of their meaning *in this context*. If I said something, would it be the right thing? I become a mute, a man who sits in silence, who is *unable to talk*. I must endure this inability: that my tongue has been taken away from me.

3.3.4.1.

This *inability* to talk is an experience that discloses a phenomenological field of existence depending on why and when I enter a foreign territory. It could be because I do not speak the language (the language is foreign, I am travelling as a tourist); I have speech problems (stammering, aphasia or brain-damage); I am suffering from Alzheimer's or dementia (I can no longer find the words and names). Excluded from the ecstasy of language, I enter into power games that I cannot win or control. During my inability to talk, I experience the violence of exclusion. In exile, where I exist amidst a language I do not speak, this inability is *forced* upon me.

3.3.5.

Existing in-between spaces, being dislocated from myself and my origins, yet not belonging to the new culture because I have not mastered its language, its codes and am lacking a social network, I become *indifferent* to its political space. It is not my space of state politics, it has not produced me as a citizen, and I do not feel I belong to it. I exist in exile in a political space that cannot claim me. This indifference arises from being denied access to the right to vote. If I am not allowed to state my difference, I become indifferent – to my surroundings and to myself. Exile is the production of this strange kind of indifference.

3.3.6.

Since the Enlightenment began to assert rationality as the governing principle in understanding nature, the social and the political, it has produced its own counter-reaction. The first

reaction to the Enlightenment was manifested in Romanticism, which highlighted all those aspects that had been repressed and marginalised by rational discourse. Romanticism questioned the power of rationalism. Romanticism's theme of estrangement and alienation is basically the question of what happens to modern man in the face of the increasing rationalisation of the world. He finds himself caught within structures from which he cannot escape ('the iron cell' of Weber), but must endure. The Romantic revolution can be seen as the revolt against the limits of endurance: the industrial world must be changed because it has become unendurable. It produces social situations that are inhuman because the individual is estranged from his 'true self', which becomes distorted in the process of estrangement. The subject is negated, the true self is put on hold. It becomes a fragmented, partial self, fulfilling a specialised function within the industrial complex.

3.3.6.1.

From another perspective, estrangement produces the *uncanny*. Both in Freudian psychoanalysis and in Heideggerian existential discourse we find the notion of the *Unheimlichkeit* of the modern world.⁷³ In Freud's text, the uncanny is the production of a mental displacement from the homely. It is the eruption of secret desires and past repressed events that haunts the rational locus of the mind; it is the invasion of strange fantasies and the experience of getting lost in a labyrinth. For Heidegger, the concept of uncanniness reveals a state of strangeness to oneself. It is the sense that I have non-knowledge regarding myself and my potential as a human.

3.3.6.2.

The experience of exile can thus be seen as a kind of estrangement, and estrangement as a kind of exile. In both instances, I am not at home. I am a stranger to myself and my surroundings. In the Romantic sense, I might be at home in my country, but 'exiled' from my true self because of structural conditions. And being a stranger is not like going on holiday to a foreign place, from which one will return. The state of being a stranger is something to be endured because I cannot suddenly escape it. I endure being a stranger to myself and not real according to my true self. Yet there is also potential to be found here, because as a state of being it carries within itself the desire to *overcome* estrangement: to take my life in a different direction, to be accepted for something else, grounded in a world where I am autonomous, alive and part of a world that is meaningful.

3.3.7.

In relation to the three initial aspects of endurance – the ability to endure, living in a space of consequences and being worn down – exile is a possible state of being because my existence is able to endure exile. I can exist in a foreign cultural environment as a body, but living away from a native place could be the outcome of a decision. Nonetheless, it is a space of

consequence, whether I chose it myself or was forced by external circumstances: the how, the when and the why are decisions I make in that state of exemption. And exile is temporal because it is always a condition lasting more than just weeks or months; years of life lived away from home becomes exile. It is time spent that cannot be regained and this knowledge produces a nostalgia within me: the sad feeling of being away from a home and past that is no longer accessible.

3.4. ISOLATION

*'Isolation is the sum total of wretchedness to a man.'*⁷⁴
(Thomas Carlyle)

3.4.1.

Isolation is the perceived distance other people have from my being. I can thus be institutionally isolated, but have close ties to my family, or be isolated from my family, but have strong relations with my colleagues. In both instances, I perceive a distance in specific social contexts: I know that I am not welcome, because I feel their hostility, notice their absence of invitations and long periods during which I experience no contact with them. My isolation means that I am not granted visibility within the social group to which I would like to belong. My isolation is my *marginalisation*.

3.4.2.

On another level, I am isolated if I do not participate in a *community of contribution*,⁷⁵ if I have no way to *give* my way of being to others, or if no one wants to receive my gifts. And here, a community of contribution begins with a loving relationship. I am isolated if I have no one to love, because I cannot share my ability to love with another: I am unable to *give* love and *receive* love; I have no access to physical intimacy and no friends with whom I can share my world. My isolation can be extended, as when I exist within a social world but I am not part of it, when I have no neighbours who care for me, when I have no family or friends. Isolation means that everyone can see that you are standing alone, without a network to protect you.

3.4.3.

The space of isolation can be accompanied by stigmatisation (Goffmann).⁷⁶ Stigmatisation can happen because one belongs to a generic category that 'wrongs' one's identity. For example, I might be isolated because I belong to the 'wrong' race, 'wrong' profession, 'wrong' age or 'wrong' nationality. A part of me is elevated to the totality of me: I am judged only for an aspect of myself, but the judgement has totalising consequences. I am excluded for one sole

reason. In other instances, stigmatisation might follow as the consequence of an action, if I (or one of my family members) become known as he who has committed a crime.

3.4.4.

I earlier evoked metaphysical solitude, which is different from imposed or self-elected solitude.⁷⁷ Metaphysical solitude is the feeling that I have no absolute foundation upon which I can build my world. I am constituted by a metaphysical knot: own being (the body), given being (the social) and final being (time). I am always situated within this field of forces, yet I have no inner core that remains the same. I am pulled into and through life by these relations I unfold, yet I have no foundation below or above me. I am not safe from the sense of nothingness hovering within me, that sense of infinite darkness that could swallow me at any moment. My metaphysical solitude, this feeling of being alone with a nothingness *within* me, produces a strange sense of isolation. I might be amongst other people, but I still feel alone. I must endure this feeling of isolation.

3.4.4.1.

And this emptiness within me, this cavity within my worked-over mass of erected flesh, has a special temporal dimension to it. It is connected to the infinity of time that I contain within myself as an individual: the virtuality of time is present within me as latency, as possibilities unrealised (Merleau-Ponty). There is time within me, but not *time enough*. The sum total of my virtuality exceeds my actual capacity for time, and this produces the temporal aspect of metaphysical solitude. I have time, I desire time, but I cannot accomplish the *totality of time*.⁷⁸

3.4.5.

I must endure the fact that I see others communicating, immersed in that naturalised space of belonging that comes from being *within* a language. I sit alone, walled up in my incommunicable language, like a prisoner in an inverted jail: wanting to be inside the walls of ecstasy, but sent out into the space of non-being. I watch, I am silent, I wait, I endure. And I am crying within.

3.4.6.

There is a sense of isolation and solitude that arises in periods of depression. It is an emptiness, a deep inner sense of solitude, of *feeling* the most alone in the whole universe. It is an isolation so overwhelming that it becomes unbearable. It cannot be endured. It is so violently aggressive that it digs a hole right under my feet, so I feel as if I am standing on nothing. The solid ground below me has gone. The skin of the earth can at any time be peeled off, only to reveal a huge vacant space. Suicide can become the solution to such a devastating feeling of isolation.

3.4.7.

In the interpersonal theory of suicide (Joiner),⁷⁹ isolation is one of several factors feeding into the state of being that can trigger the violent act of self-murder. A self-murders the 'it' of itself because the 'it' now stands for an isolated entity without any relation to the world of other people. The self as an 'it' has become worthless; it is a thing for which no one cares, and that has no reason to go on living. Joiner calls this the 'thwarted feeling of belonging' that designates the *denial* of our most basic need for a sense of emotional belongingness to the world.⁸⁰

3.5. POVERTY

3.5.1.

Poverty is a state of being that must be endured within a social context because I cannot *escape* my situation from one moment to the next. I can decide to *improve* it, but then I will still have to endure the years it takes to get out of poverty. How I *experience* poverty depends on my age, my social background and my current access to social welfare. In the following I will try to sketch out some phenomenological variances regarding poverty. As an artist I have had experience of poverty due to my life-form (precarious existence). I am living on the margins of poverty because there are periods when I have no income and do not know how I will be able to pay next month's rent. But I differ from truly poor people (those who literally have nothing) because I have decided to stake my artistic freedom on the possibility of poverty. Poverty is a risk I am running.

3.5.2.

Who are the poor in society? Poverty represents a position in a social context at a given moment in historical time depending on the index designating the limits of poverty. It designates a *distance* to the *median* income level of a society (relative poverty). Those who are poor are *below* the threshold of what the average person can expect from life. Poverty in Denmark is not the same as poverty in India, China or Latin America, because the distance from the average income is not the same. A poor person in the West could be as wealthy as a middle-income person in China. The 'poor person' will experience his poverty in relation to his immediate surroundings, to what others have and do and he does not. Poverty therefore designates a negation of possibilities within the space of the possible. I am poor if I do not have access to what ordinary people have access to on a daily and yearly basis. For example, a poor person does not go on several holidays each year, to the cinema every week, buy new clothes every weekend, drive his own car and live in a high-end neighbourhood in a house he owns. From a phenomenological perspective, poverty means living in a reduced space with the awareness that others have access to different kinds of being.

3.5.2.1.

Following the phenomenological path, poverty reveals itself in relation to the material quality of how the given manifests itself. If I am poor I most likely eat cheap food, wear shoddy clothes, live in a small apartment, buy discount furniture and equipment. My life-world is saturated with objects and environments that are marked by low quality. In our Western world defined by industrialised products, my poverty *standardises* me, since I am forced to consume what the mass also consumes, because this is the cheapest option. My poverty does not allow me to individualise myself through my consumption and I do not have the same capacity to externalise my difference in a social environment. A poor person does not 'show off' his poverty. A walk in a high-end area of town reveals the opposite: those who are wealthy live in larger houses equipped with designer furniture, have delightful gardens, better views of nature, drive more prestigious cars, buy nicer clothes and food, and travel more frequently abroad. They can also afford to hire services and extra help to do the manual work, such as cleaning, cooking and gardening. All these 'positive' aspects of wealth (from a different perspective they can also be viewed as empty signs covering up a lack of substance) are what I, as a poor person, am denied access to. My poverty influences the phenomenological experience of how I am able to enjoy, organise and live my life, which perceptions and sensations I have access to and what I am *forced* to do. My poverty sets limits to my life, like a fence erected by my low value in society.

3.5.3.

In the Nordic Welfare Society, the poor have been raised to a new level compared with a hundred years ago. Today, they have access to healthcare, higher education, cultural and social benefits and proper housing, in a way completely different from their historical counterparts a century ago and their contemporary counterparts in America. Nonetheless, poverty is still an issue and still *felt*, and it still comes with social stigmatisation. My poverty produces within me a feeling of worthlessness as a human subject, because my poverty is the direct translation of my value in social space: I do not have any.

3.5.3.1.

On another level, poverty is also the absence of power. If I am poor, I cannot *buy* the services, favours, products and goods of others. I do not have power over other people in the same way a rich man who has personal assistants, chauffeurs, cleaning staff, babysitters, lawyers and advisors does, and I do not *attract* the attention and good will of all those who want to access my wealth, such as the salesperson, the gallery owner, the entrepreneur and the politician.

3.5.4.

Poverty can make me desperate and it can make me worthless, because the reasons for my poverty are incarnated into my existence. In a Western society, if I have no inherited wealth and no higher education, I will very likely be poor because I cannot make a high wage from

my job – if I even have a job at all. So my non-education, my absence of education, feeds into the gaze that judges me in social space. This means that as a poor man I have often been subjected to indifference and arrogance, because I cannot mean anything (I have no knowledge, no skills, no contacts) and I have not been selected by society. He who is poor has been disregarded, is a waste-product that is dispensable. He who is poor becomes a scavenger, on the lookout for food in trash cans, taking leftover furniture from the streets, committing petty crime.

3.5.5.

My poverty makes me destitute, and over time it will wear me down. In the worst case, it will force me to sleep on the streets. Then my life revolves around the question of the next meal and the next safe place to sleep, of where and how to obtain a few coins that will help sustain me. As a homeless person I express the extreme form of poverty, because I have no access to physical shelter to protect my body and my belongings. What I own is basically what I can carry on a cart. I become filthy, reeking due to poor hygiene and musty old clothes. The effect of my poverty radiates from me and pushes other people away.

3.5.5.1.

To endure poverty can in its extreme form be to endure starvation. Then poverty forces me to migrate and travel to new territories in search of a better and worthwhile occupation. Poverty can turn me into a slave who has to take whatever job comes along, no matter how hard or demeaning it is.

3.5.6.

Poverty is the reduction of choices as the approximation to necessity: I have to live with what I can get.

3.5.7.

There is a relationship between poverty and time. As a poor man, my time can be wasted. My time as a human is considered worthless. This destruction of time translates into my social being: I have nothing to do. I hang around on street corners. I am forced to use the cheapest means of transport, waiting at bus stops, for example, while the wealthy do not have to wait.

3.5.7.1.

As a poor person, I am also forced to do all my own physical tasks without help, because I cannot afford to pay others. Poverty drains me: I am forced to take jobs that are badly paid, I am unable to make long-term plans and I live in hostile conditions. The hardship of life is translated into the wearing down of my body.

3.5.8.

A pure instantiation of ‘the poor’ is the beggar. There are several manifestations of asking for money. In Berlin, the beggar enters an S-bahn and declares his or her destitute situation, asking for small amounts of money; others simply sit on street corners with a small note requesting money; some stand in front of the post office selling a newspaper for the homeless. In each circumstance, a beggar asks for a donation through which his situation is not resolved, only momentarily relieved.

3.5.8.1.

Through the public act of declaring himself ‘poor’, the beggar also changes the transition-space between himself and the passerby. Poverty becomes a force that breaks down the barrier between humans, because the poor enters directly into the other’s field of sight and demands monetary help. He is allowed to do so because his poverty is a state of exemption for him. He is the one who is poor, the passerby is not – the latter being immersed in his daily web of a life-world with tasks and assignments to deliver.

3.5.9.

It is seldom the case that poverty in itself leads to suicide, because poverty basically designates a relative position in a social and economical context. Millions of people live below the poverty line designated by the UN, but do not kill themselves. Yet a sudden ‘fall’ within society from wealth to bankruptcy and social failure, with the prospect of living in poverty and shame for the rest of a life, can lead to suicide (can become an *échec* as Jean Amery would put it). The shareholder who loses all his investments during a financial crisis or the businessman who bankrupts his company might resolve to commit suicide because the thought of living in dire conditions, severed from his social world, becomes unendurable.

3.6. BURDENSOMENESS

‘If we had waited for our death due to sickness, we would have caused much inconvenience to all of you.’⁸¹
(Suicide note written by a Malaysian couple)

3.6.1.

Burdensomeness is when my powers of self-preservation are inadequate to cope with an environment and thus my existence becomes dependent on others. It basically means I am weak, because I lack the fundamental powers to exist. I am a burden because I cannot care for myself. From this perspective, a small infant is a burden because it cannot sustain life on its own, and a sick person is a burden because he is dependent on medical care for his survival. In both instances, I am a burden, yet my burdensomeness is ‘legitimate’, because as a child

I am not expected to care for myself and as an ill person I am simply unable to perform the tasks necessary for my survival. In the latter case, the expectations in relation to my 'normal self' are bracketed because we cannot expect a sick person to perform like a healthy adult. Being sick is thus a justifiable reason not to conform to the standard requirements of working, being helpful or delivering on a task.

3.6.1.1.

In these instances, the sense of burdensomeness operates within a social matrix of caring and looking after other people with the perspective of either developing into autonomy (from child to adult) or returning to a state of health. These aspects explain the complexity regarding burdensomeness as a concept, because it is part of the fundamental interdependency between humans: we come into being through an asymmetrical relationship (as a baby looked after by its parents), but must transcend this state, developing into a mature being that can preserve itself.

3.6.2.

But then there are the instances where I as an adult become a burden when I can no longer preserve myself on an economic level when I cannot pay my bills and the rent or buy food for my family (being unemployed, a 'social failure'). Then I have to ask either friends or family or the public welfare state for help, and this asking makes me a burden because I put pressure on those I ask for help. I am asking them to do something *for me* (give me money) that I should be able to do *myself* (by working or not spending foolishly). Being that burden as a person who cannot sustain himself in an economic environment can be accompanied by a feeling of shame and low self-esteem. To exist as a burden can become unendurable, because as a burden I am enduring a state of being where I am not a master of myself to the point where I can preserve myself.

3.6.2.1.

It is one thing when one is unable to support oneself financially or needs a high degree of care with no recovery in sight; it is another when one is challenged with mental health issues (schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, borderline disturbances), or drug or alcohol abuse. In these cases, social confusion arises from the mental illness: an inability to perform the function of parenting, constantly disappointing friends and relatives, which can lead to the sense of being a burden.

3.6.2.2.

A different aspect of burdensomeness is the question of *shame* and *disgrace* in a social context: being a burden because I have become a disgrace to my family for what I have done – or what I am. If I am a criminal, caught committing fraud, for example, or an official responsible for a catastrophe, then I am guilty not only of bringing shame upon myself, but also of dishonour-

ing the family name. Here, burdensomeness often transforms itself into a feeling of guilt and self-reproach that has to be endured.

3.6.3.

According to the interpersonal theory of suicide (Joiner), burdensomeness is one of several factors that can lead to taking one's own life. Here, burdensomeness reveals itself in the thinking: '*The world would be much better off without me.*' And this world that would be better off is the world of those who co-inhabit my interior life.⁸² I have within me all these people who make up my life-world: they exist as faces, voices, imaginary bodies – I see them all, and they speak to me. They are my world and I can hear them speak: '*What a nuisance! What a disaster! What a pain in the ass! It would be much better without him.*' I can make them say all these things and in my sorrow I can come to the conclusion that it will be easier if I departed from this world. My burdensomeness becomes a *perceived burdensomeness*, which according to Joiner can trigger the act of suicide (but can be treated through psychotherapy). The person who commits suicide does it in order to 'remove' himself, the burden, from the world, because being a burden can no longer be endured. Many suicide notes testify to this sense of being a burden now or in the future, to a life-world.

3.6.3.1.

In societies (especially primitive societies with harsh climate conditions) where food and resources were scarce, it was once expected of elderly people who had become a burden to commit suicide. These kinds of suicides can be seen as altruistic suicides⁸³ (Durkheim), because they represent moments where an individual gives up his own life for the sake of the social (as in the case of the old Malaysian couple who jumped out of a 15th-storey window, so as not to become a burden to their children).

3.6.4.

The old doctor did not leave a note. Only his insurance papers were laid out on his desk. He took an overdose of painkillers and went to sleep in his bed. The cleaning lady found him. He had known what awaited him: the gruesome annihilation of his personality through the unfolding of Alzheimers. He was diagnosed with the disease and understood that he would lose everything: his memory, his ability to recognise family faces and to behave like a civilised person. He would dissolve and this dissolving would be a burden for everyone around him. He did not want to become that burden. He could not endure the thought of ending his life as an abomination to himself and others. He preferred to end it with a long sleep.

 ENDURING TIME-DEATH: FINAL BEING

*'The true being-towards-death, which means the finitude of temporality, is the secret foundation of Dasein's historicity.'*⁸⁴
 (Martin Heidegger)

4.01.

I am enduring accumulated time within my body: the fact that I have existed in time and survived it until now. A presence to time is the intimacy I have with my time right now – being present on a certain date, hour, minute; yet my access to this intimacy of time comes from that long voyage *through* time that I have accomplished. My present age of 39 is conditioned by the fact that I have survived from my birth in 1977 to the present: I survived year 5, year 10, year 21, 29 etc. I am a pyramid of time (Bergson) and within me are these time-layers, making my flesh vibrant – not like pancakes stacked upon each other, but like a lake of fluidity where spaces of memories, events and states of being are interrelated in a non-linear way. On the other side of my intimacy is the fact that I have always been present to *my* time, resisted the *violence of time*: I entered historical time and was thereby given a horizon to live *my* life. From the moment I was born, my death was a fact; not when or how, just the fact that I was going to die at some point beyond my moment of birth.

4.02.

My intimacy with time, my access to its ecstasy, comes at a high price: I must endure the violent fact that time is passing by and that I know that ultimately I am going to die. To be

temporalised as a human being means to be aware of death, to internalise death to the point where death makes me live, because I take death upon me: *'Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself. By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it "is" at all.'*⁸⁵ (Heidegger). I can only live because I am able to die, yet in my movement towards death I do not know when it will appear, how it will crash in upon me and under which circumstances. Whatever I do, I approach death, however far away I seem from my eighties, when, statistically, I will die. At this current moment, my time and manner of death are *unknown* to me (unless I commit suicide) and to the world. This uncertainty regarding *my* death enables me to search for happiness elsewhere and embark on great adventures in the world, because I am not safeguarded from death anywhere. Time is like a great ocean where death is always on the horizon, yet still so far away that I can enjoy my life right now.

4.03.

Enduring time is the double negation of time: I endure something that conditions me, that I cannot escape, but through my endurance – through keeping myself alive, remaining in a position where I can enter into time – I am negating time by simply enduring time. Here, in the *first negation*, negating time means resisting its impersonal and indifferent duration. I negate time by existing – that is, by using time productively through doing something that either sustains me (obtaining a wage through performing a service), leaves a trace (actually making something) or produces a positive difference (helping others, as in voluntary work). I can learn to master time, as in making productive use of time, when I have a *relation* to time.

4.04.

The *second negation* of time comes from my acceptance of time as something limited to me (my finitude in a Heideggerian sense, as opposed to my mortality). Through accepting my death as a natural thing that *will* happen, I learn to endure time as a space of virtuality: I am given over to a time that awaits me in all its potentiality. So much can happen to me in a positive sense, yet not everything can happen. My second negation of time is related to an aspect of metaphysical solitude: that I do not have time enough to do everything humanly possible in the world. I will never have access to all aspects of how the given can manifest itself. Once I accept this fundamental limitation to my being, I negate time in a different sense, because I destroy the ability of time to disperse me into its own anonymous current. The totality of so much time can completely weigh me down, paralyse me to the point of apathy. Time can engulf me in ennui: *'Ennui is the echo in us of time tearing itself apart ... the revelation of the void, the drying up of that delirium which sustains – or invents – life.'*⁸⁶ (Cioran). Through my active destruction of the temporal infinity that lies ahead of me (by accepting my limitations), I produce a negation of time through which I achieve time, but also consciousness of its limits for me (for example, the active choice of being with my children when they are small because I know this state of being will not last). We could say that the second negation is the *active awareness* of being present to *my* time in time.

4.05.

In this section I will touch on a number of time-experiences that are pulled into the dimension of final being due to their nature, yet in a way that also pressurises me. These are the phenomena of stress, the solitude of dying alone, the death of others, the process of ageing and the death drive. These are some aspects of the horrifying powers of time that must be endured.

4.1. STRESS

4.1.1.

Stress designates the threshold where the violence of being within an environment exceeds an organism's ability to stay in balance with it. An environment can stress an organism (here, a human body-self) if it presents itself as a potential threat to the organism's survival or makes demands that have to be fulfilled within a limited time frame. Stress as a phenomenon appears within a spectrum of possible *forms* in *different contexts* as the total *pressure* exercised upon an individual. Thus there can be stress in the space of social reproduction (both having children and not being able to conceive), the space of love (both having a spouse and being single) or with primary networks (disagreements with close friends or family); there can be stress related to the zone of work (the amount of work to be delivered, the approach of a deadline, the lack of funding for a project, going bankrupt, arguments with colleagues or boss) or the zone of education (not getting good-enough grades, preparing for an exam, benchmarking against other students); there can be stress related to socio-economic issues (being poor, without a job, being fired, being evicted); there can be stress on a racial and political level (being discriminated against because of my race or persecuted by the state for my political beliefs) – just to mention some of the common factors in the manifestation of stress in all zones of life.

4.1.2.

Throughout human evolution, stress has been vital for our adaptation⁸⁷ as a species, because through the overcoming of challenges (the stressors) we learn and we become stronger. But if the stress continues, with the constant production of 'stressors', the individual is unable to return to the balance of life. Living under prolonged exposure to stress, when the body has no chance to recuperate, can lead to exhaustion. A number of physiological changes take place in cases of *chronic stress*, especially the increased production of the hormone cortisol. Over time, this will enlarge the amygdala (the centre of the brain for the processing of emotions), leading to panic attacks and depression, increased blood pressure and heart palpitations. As a result, the liver will produce excessive glucose to feed the nerve cells of the brain, resulting in general bodily fatigue.⁸⁸

4.1.3.

An aspect that seems to be common to all manifestations of stress is *lack of control and uncertainty*. That which stresses me I cannot control and thus I am unable to foresee exactly what will happen. This situation forces me into a space where I have no free zone or point of relaxation, but must constantly react to the aggressive assault in order to survive.

4.1.3.1.

Let us look at one aspect of stress in relationship to *time*: the work-related stress of meeting a deadline. Here, stress arises when the form-event expected from me threatens to exceed my being-ability (the form of what I can deliver), when I simply do not have enough time and I am forced to *squeeze* time: to deliver myself with maximum intensity and output, rushing from one thing to the next with no opportunity to relax. In the zone of stress the deadline approaches like a cockroach on my doorstep, gnawing at my heels. Time *bites* me to pieces. Then I either have to run faster (and become more stressed) or accept that I will not make it (and then be stressed by the consequences of not delivering). Either way, my balance with my environment is disturbed.

4.1.3.2.

On a structural level, this kind of work-related stress arises the moment time becomes a resource that can be exploited, optimised and manipulated. Once time has manifested itself as a measurable unit (the system of global standard-time) every activity, performance or production can be measured *against* it. In an age of advanced technology, statistics and global competitive markets, the possibility of concentrating time has reached a completely new level in comparison to previous generations. From the time of transportation, logistics, communication, news stories, to the time of politics, construction, education and social media: everywhere time has been *speeded* up, with all delays levelled out. Every process has been benchmarked against its competitors and against itself.

4.1.3.3.

Stress develops an aspect of me in relation to presence: that of *present absence*.⁸⁹ I am there, but I am also elsewhere, focusing on the task to be accomplished. Stress means I cannot be present to other activities, other people or non-productive states of mind, because I withdraw myself from my embedded world in order to deliver on the task, to meet the deadline.

4.1.3.4.

Stress produces an inner tension in my body, thus making me *irritable*. My fuse is short, and I start to snap at people, getting angry and upset in ways out of proportion with the situation. During stress, my inner calmness is disturbed because my constant fight for survival makes me tired and fragile. Another side-effect of chronic stress is *forgetfulness*, which can be seen as a different kind of present absence. I forget things – from my possessions on public transport, to my keys in shops, to appointments with friends, and even where my body is situated. My

ability to remember, to be focused, concentrated and to think straight is impaired by the exposure to stress. It is the physiological reaction to a pressure that exceeds the organism; it is signals from the body telling the self that its system is reaching its breaking point. When stress can no longer be endured, it becomes burn-out: the disappearance of light within the self.

4.2. SOLITUDE

*'The truly solitary being is not the man who is abandoned by men, but the man who suffers in their midst, who drags his desert through the marketplace and deploys his talents as a smiling leper, a mountebank of the irreparable.'*⁹⁰

(E.M. Cioran)

4.2.1.

I find it helpful to divide solitude into three different kinds: imposed, self-elected and metaphysical solitude. *Imposed solitude* can be seen as a kind of *loneliness*, meaning social stigmatisation, isolation and rejection. Here, the person is denied access to the social and his solitude is thus *imposed* upon him. The imposed solitude I view as negative, because the subject in question cannot enter into a social world. It is the position of the marginalised, the outsider and the stranger.

4.2.1.1.

In my imposed solitude there arises a sense of time passing me by, and that I am all *alone*: I have no physical presence to others. I feel *deserted*. I have memories of being with other people, I can see other people are together, but not with me. I have been *left* alone, like someone shipwrecked on an island surrounded by dangerous waters. No one comes to rescue me. Within me my public self is curled up, contracted to a small ball of pain. A haunting thought accompanies this state: I could have passed this time with somebody else. To endure imposed solitude is thus to endure being alone: I cannot enter into the social, it does not welcome me. A strange premonition of what my death will be like comes to mind: I will die alone. The coldness of death releases a shiver within me. The image of imposed solitude evokes the colour blue and a sense of numbness.

4.2.1.2.

A common experience of imposed solitude is that of being *bullied*. Here, I am excluded from a group and denied access to its social ecstasies. I might even be physically abused, mocked, ridiculed. Bullying is a phenomenon that takes place on many levels of society, from the schoolyard to the workplace to the political space.

4.2.1.3.

Denied access to the social, I am left to myself, in silence. I walk the streets alone in the evening, looking into restaurants, cafés and people's homes and I see a life of togetherness: people enjoying each other's company. I am outside, looking into that life *on the other side*. I say nothing, walled up within myself, filled with a desire to be part of something.

4.2.2.

Self-elected solitude is when I consciously decide to retreat to a space in order to achieve something specific, clear my mind or find a moment of peace. It is when I take time off to read or write a book, walk in the mountains or enter into a state of self-enclosed being. Here, my primary social world welcomes me back, accepts me into its midst. Self-elected solitude is positive because I retreat with productivity in mind: something is to be achieved (an end-product or a state of mind), and I can always return to the social. An element of *narcissism* prevails in the state of self-elected solitude because it is a self that *enjoys* itself: being alone, self-enclosed in a state of contemplation, creativity and production. Self-elected solitude is an act of honourable withdrawal from the social, because something worthwhile and valuable will be achieved, and later appraised by the social. Self-elected solitude is not shameful; rather, it is envied because it is time *for* oneself: a self that *gives* time *to* itself.

4.2.3.

Metaphysical solitude is the feeling of being tied to a metaphysical knot that is empty, an emptiness that is the ontological price we pay for our virtuality: there is no absolute foundation upon which to rest my life, my choices, my personality. There is a game of existence that is open for everyone, because the dimensions of own, given and final being do not predicate anything other than the necessity of relating to these forces, of taking care and shaping meaningful relations to being in whatever form it might take. In the midst of this game of existence I attempt to fulfil my potential, to explore and develop as much as possible, yet I cannot accomplish everything. My virtuality always exceeds my power of actuality. There is never enough time to become *everything*. But still hovering within me are the traces of a cosmic time that tells me that I could have played the game of existence differently, made different choices regarding my life. I could have become something other, even though I have attempted to *other* myself, to find a heterogeneity within my being.

4.2.3.1.

Metaphysical solitude haunts me in a different way, too, because it is attached to the awareness that ultimately I am going to die alone. In taking that final breath, I will either be inhaling or exhaling for the *last* time and that *last* time will be *my* last time. Death is going to be my death. I cannot escape it; nor can I escape the fact that it constantly returns to my consciousness as something to consider. I simply have it as an intentional object, as something I see in my mind's eye: my body stiff and motionless, lying there as a corpse. I see it within my

imagination. I feel that coldness emanating from my deceased body. That body is dead and the person I have been is also dead. There is a solitude to that cold body: I imagine the warm friendly body with the ability to laugh, smile and speak to the world transitioning into that state of silence and lifelessness.

4.2.3.2.

On a train coming back from the studio, I am overwhelmed by the chatter of the girls sitting opposite me. They talk about everyday things – who did what, when etc. – and I ask myself: do they have any idea of all the thoughts that my body-brain has hosted? That immense work through thinking to which my non-philosophical propositions testify? I try to convince myself that the tired expression on my face together with the intensity of my eyes could be a sign that within this body a world of thinking has accumulated. And yet, it fills me with a sense of tragic solitude that so few are aware of the tormented state of existence that I have been enduring over the years.

4.3. THE DEATH OF OTHERS

*'To think that so many have succeeded in dying!'*⁹¹

(E.M. Cioran)

4.3.1.

I must endure the dying of others, because I cannot exist in life without experiencing the death of those close to me. First my grandparents go, then my father, and then friends begin to add themselves to the list. There is a difference between these deaths, because they do not all inhabit my interior in the same way. The death of very old people who in their last years crumble, lose their spirit, their proper 'I' and become sleepwalkers – their death is not accompanied by the same deep sorrow attached to those departing too early from life, but with a strange relief and a feeling of gratitude. It is a relief on their part and on the part of the living: there is no longer a need to care for a life that is not able to survive anymore. And there is gratitude because they were given a long and meaningful life here on earth, where I was able to enjoy their love and company. But the death of a child or a young person – either through a tragic accident, fatal illness, violent murder or suicide – such a death fills me with sorrow. It is a sorrow I must endure because I am forever severed from the being-with of that specific person who is forever gone. A young person is not only encapsulated time, but also a virtuality of time awaiting the future with enormous powers of creation, that through his or her premature end is brought to a halt. It is the end of an ability to be in life.

4.3.2.

Internal co-inhabitation is the doubling of other people within me. I am inhabited by those I love, those with whom I have shared life – and these are all organised into different distances, the closest being my nearest family, my friends, and colleagues, extending to my neighbours, distant relatives etc. Depending on the way they die, their age, and how I am allowed to grieve, I must endure their deaths one way or the other. Their death awaits me, but it is something I will not know until it seizes them, drags them away from life. I think of all the people who inhabit my interior and I wonder how they will die, perplexed by the fact that they too will one day succeed in dying. I must, and I will in one continuous movement until my own death, endure sorrow and distress from the death of others.

4.3.3.

I remember the pain I felt 15 years ago when grieving the sudden death of my father at the age of 64. I still have within me that feeling of sorrow, of being overwhelmed, *disempowered* by how grief coloured my life. In the beginning, I counted the hours separating him from me. Hours turned into days, weeks, months and finally a whole year elapsed. On that day of year one, I felt tremendous relief. I had *endured* it until now; I had survived grieving him as well as the necessary transformation that followed. The wound had stopped bleeding. Time had sucked me into that space of grief, forcing me to endure sorrow for a whole year, and slowly I began to arise as something new. Today, I view his death as a monumental transformation of my whole being, because it was an experience of rupture that liberated a new self within me. His life carried lessons that enabled me to live differently. His death forced me to do what I *wanted* with my life.

4.3.4.

The mourning of the lost object (the loved one) is a classic cause of depression according to the psychoanalytic tradition.⁹² This darkness caused by the death of someone very close is a retroactive depression because one's love is turned inwards. With every death of someone close to me I will be sucked into the darkness that equals the light that this person sends into my life. Ahead of every great illumination that other people are to me awaits the equivalent tunnel of pitch-black darkness (their potential death). I will not live with or think about this future darkness (all those who could disappear *from* me) simply because I do not know how it will manifest itself – or even if I will be there to endure it. With all my powers, I hope to die before any of my closest family and friends, simply because I do not want to endure the grief.

4.3.4.1.

All those who internally co-inhabit my interior on a daily basis, those who fill me with light, I am not sure I am able to endure their premature death. Yet on a daily basis I endure the staggering numbers of death tolls announced in the news. Every day, refugees are drowning in huge numbers while trying to cross the Mediterranean in search of a better life. Every day,

people are killed in terrorist suicide attacks and in bombings carried out by drones. Every day, people die from disasters – either natural or human-made. The global death toll is so depressing – all these people constantly dying under such different circumstances – yet their deaths are at a distance, because each individual does not co-inhabit my interior. They become numbers, figures in statistics, unfamiliar faces mediated by flat screens, names announced on radio or printed in newspapers. This does not mean that their terrifying ending does not affect me. There are moments when I almost vomit at the sheer thought of their situation and how they died. It means I have learnt to endure the constant announcement of death in the media, and that it remains always at a distance.

4.3.4.2.

Sometimes when I look at an elderly person, I think to myself: When is he going to die? What will his death be like? Will he suffer? Will it be violent? What will happen afterwards? Will his family be relieved or struck by sorrow? So many questions arise in my mind just by looking at this other person. I transport him into a coffin. I see his dead body lying there, his eyelids closed as if he is sleeping, but with all his clothes on. Around him there is a solemn atmosphere, periods of pensive silence. People walk up to him, say goodbye, touch his ice-cold hand for the last time, allowing a tear to drop. The coffin lid smacks down and off he goes. Into the ground. That is it.

4.3.5.

It seems to me impossible to go through life without experiencing grief over the loss of a loved one. To endure time will at one point mean to endure the death of someone very close to me, which means enduring the time it takes to grieve and the transformation that follows from the death of someone co-inhabiting my interior. Time creates people, but it also sucks them back into time. I have to endure the terrible fact of immanence.

4.4. AGEING

*'A poor wretch who feels time, who is its victim, its martyr, who experiences nothing else, who is time at each moment, knows what a metaphysician or a poet divines only by grace of a collapse or a miracle.'*⁹³
(E.M. Cioran)

4.4.1.

I am an enduring being. I have lasted 39 years and will statistically last another 39 years. I am ageing into life as that being who came into existence on 1 August 1977 on a small island in the southern region of Denmark. From this entry point I came into historical time and until now, June 2017, I have preserved this body in a form capable of existing. I am an existent

being who has survived the fact of existence (Levinas) by taking up my own existence each day all those years. Yet every year when I approach my birthday, celebrating a date that is 'precious' to me, I cross a new moment of my own evolution. My birthday is a remembrance point; it fixes me and it delineates me because it keeps me in place. I cannot escape it and my distance from it. 39 years. Next summer it will be 40, and then 41, 42 etc., each year adding itself on to the next in an order I cannot prevent; I cannot 'jump' my age either backwards or forwards. I use my birthday to evaluate myself, to measure myself against my own previous ambitions and dreams (when I was 20 I believed that at age 40 I would be Mr so and so). And I use my birthday to celebrate myself: announcing an event where I am the centre, the person who is special *that* day.

4.4.2.

My body testifies to a certain way of ageing. I might look 'young' for my age, or 'old' for my age. I look at myself in the mirror, and only *I* know what I have *endured*.

4.4.3.

Ageing means that time is accumulating within my body, pushing me onto another plane of existence. I have traversed different planes of existence since being a newborn lying in a pram with wonderful eyes and yet a monstrous body: a screaming, crying body that defecated in nappies, that was messy when eating, that shouted and kicked and performed nonsensical actions. I survived time and developed according to the generalised scheme for infant growth, traversing the plane of boyhood, then puberty and teens – being young. And now in my late thirties, I am still alive, but no longer with the same qualities as a 18-year old. I am on another plane of existence now and I have to endure the fact that I have *so* much time within me and *so* little time left. And with *no* possibility of *returning*.

4.4.4.

Ageing means leaving generational times behind and understanding what was once a future time: that of being 39 years old. I now know what it means to be *my* age, but I still do not know what it means to be 69.

4.4.4.1.

Ageing is entering into a new social category: that of the 'old' and for some, that of the retired. Having eclipsed the space of the young body, the old body is covered in wrinkles, grey hair, muscles hanging like tea bags around fragile bones. It is time manifesting itself, gnawing at the body, slowly making it ready for the final decomposition in the grave. As a social category, I am 'pushed' into the generic space of the old by those who are younger than me. They define themselves negatively against me, as someone participating in a way of being of which they are not part. My age represents a distance because not only am I older, but I am also part

of a paradigm that they want to destroy. I am not on their side in the cultural battlefield, and I have to endure this *generational war* into which I am forced.

4.4.5.

Ageing is the accumulation of a certain temporal perspective on a life that has been lived: from my point in time, I am able to *look back* with a depth that is different from that of a five-year-old child. My memory-image of the past is now different, and through ageing I experience the constant reinterpretation of my past.

4.4.5.1.

When I was searching for a children's DVD in my mother's chest of drawers I found a family document: a photograph taken outside the mansion where my aunt was married for the second time in 2000. We are all there: my grandfather, aunts and uncles, my mother, father, my sisters and brothers – and myself. I am standing at the back, gazing not directly into the camera, but off into the horizon. I have a dark, gloomy expression in my eyes. I stand there stiffly. Suddenly I remember the horrid state of being I was in at that point in time. I shudder as from an awakening: those were days of heavy pain. I remember vividly sitting in a hotel room just before leaving for church, almost naked, making a self-portrait of a face scarred and red, not wanting to go anywhere, full of pain and anger. That state of being has gone now. I no longer feel with the same intensity. It has been 17 years since then and I am different: I have now fulfilled myself to the point where my being has disclosed itself through my artworks and my writing: everything is already out there and, as such, I am ready to go. I am not ashamed of ageing anymore because I have done what that young man in the photograph once desired: I have become an artist and a thinker (a generic singularity).

4.4.6.

At my current age of 39, I think to myself: I am not sure I want to become an old man with a wretched body unable to live anymore, with no memory of who I am, with no use to the world and with no powers of existence. I would rather die with dignity in a peaceful suicide (euthanasia) knowing that I fulfilled myself and created something worthwhile. A life should be worth living, not something you live just because you can cling onto it.

4.5. ENDURING THE SIGHT OF MY OWN DEATH: THE DEATH DRIVE

*'The appetite for destruction is so deeply anchored within us that no one manages to extirpate it. It belongs to our constitution, for the very basis of our being is demonic.'*⁹⁴
(E.M. Cioran)

*'We remember the old saying: Si vis pacem, para bellum. If you desire peace, prepare for war. It would be timely thus to paraphrase it: Si vis vitam, para mortem. If you would endure life, be prepared for death.'*⁹⁵
(Sigmund Freud)

4.5.1.

Confronted with the empirical experience of the destructive forces unleashed by WWI, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was forced to reconsider his theories of the psychic apparatus and the idea of the self-preservative forces of the ego.⁹⁶ The latter could not rationally explain the madness of the battlefield, the lust for death that seemed to prevail among men. In order to explain what had occurred, a death drive had to run parallel to the life-drive. According to Freud, then, human consciousness consisted of conflicting impulses, two intertwined sets of energies that could lead to the productive forces of life or their total destruction. Eros and Thanatos.

4.5.1.1.

Whether Freud's theory really explains the split psyche of a young soldier excited by the thought of war I will not discuss here. But I will admit that I feel both a strong urge to create something (Eros) and to destroy everything (Thanatos). The 'pulses' of creation and destruction are certainly there and I must endure that they are present *within* me.⁹⁷ That much I will give to Freud and in this chapter I will consider the notion of enduring the *sight of my own death* as a variance of a death drive: that I am haunted on a regular basis by images of my own death – either the slow movement towards a final breath or the instant flash of an accident.

4.5.1.2.

Why do I think my own death? It is a speculative opportunity to think this world *without* me. I begin to perceive the world as a ghost, an invisible entity that no one sees or registers.⁹⁸ I start to wonder: What would it mean *not to exist*? What would the consequences be? How would people talk about me? Remember me? What would happen to my children, my wife, my family? How would they re-organise themselves? A ravine of questions is unleashed by this speculation that I might be dead tomorrow and that alone is reason enough for me to think from this vantage point.

4.5.1.3.

I often think back to my early twenties, when I first became obsessed with the idea of becom-

ing an artist. And now, 15 years later, I have my own studio and can make a living from it; I have accomplished that being-ability of a contemporary painter. Daily, I take myself back to those formative years, treading down memory lane to a *past self* that is somewhere present within me, but a self that did not know how the future would become real to itself. And now, here I am, amidst the reality of a spacious studio I once only imagined could be mine. Almost in the same way, I have become obsessed with my own future death. I dream of it, think of it, see it, and I wonder: what will I be thinking at the moment I know it is about to happen? Will I be able to think back, just as I think back on my twenties now, to all those times I have thought about death? Either suddenly or foreseeably, it will appear to me. This final breath. This final heartbeat. This final sight of the world. From all perspectives, it is a final something, because thereafter there will be no consciousness to think or perceive as I have done. It will be a moment that in an uncanny way I have been awaiting for so long, constantly postponing, fearing, dreading, but also wanting to happen because it will redeem me; it will end this life that in the midst of it seems to have no end.

4.5.2.

In my obsession I try to imagine my own death. There are two images I see. One is a slow death from a terminal illness; the other is an instant death in a fatal accident. I think about them over and over again. These two images are compulsions⁹⁹ within me (and thus, as repetitions, symptoms of my death drive), delineating a *spectrum* of possible *ways of dying*.

4.5.2.1.

In the first image of my death I see an old man in his sixties, lying in a hospice. It is summer and outside it is warm and green. The horizon is blue. Large windows open out towards a meadow that ends in a lake surrounded by a forest. Next to my bed sits my wife. In the adjacent room my three children are resting, taking the watching hours in turn. Once in a while my grandchild makes a noise, aware of the situation, but without the power to maintain absolute silence. It is early morning. At 8am the doctor comes by, checking the morphine being pumped into my veins. I am dozing, without pain, floating in a watery scenery of shifting images, coalescing into each other. I see myself as a child swimming, watching the mosquitoes dancing in the dusk, or sledging downhill, awestruck by the magnificent colours in the winter horizon; I see myself holding a newborn baby, riding a bike home from school, standing next to my dying father, flying over Greenland, playing soccer with my brothers, laughing with my children, having sex with my wife. All the images form themselves into a film where I am centrestage. Temporalities overlap; the serene beauty of a life lived emerges within me and fills me with joy. I did something with life, I was *part* of it, and now it is time to say goodbye. I have blood cancer, because of all the toxic oil paint with which I have been working. My body has shrunk in size. I weigh only 45 kg against my usual 75 kg. I am pale, grey, without energy. My mouth is hanging open, breathing in a dry and chalky fashion.

4.5.2.2.

The doctor has terminated the chemotherapy because it was having no effect on the tumours spreading rapidly through my body. I know that I might die at any time. I feel a strange emptiness inside. I am ready to go. It is okay that I am departing, because I have emptied myself into this life. I have pushed myself into this life, done something with it, and I know that in many places in the world there are traces of my body: paintings, drawings, books I have written, boxes of sketches, hundreds of notebooks.

4.5.2.3.

Before the cancer reached its end-stage, I knew that this would be it. I knew I would not have the strength to fight it, so I took the decision to finish off as much as possible before I had to go. I closed all cases I was working on; decided what went where, who was to inherit what. I organised my archive and arranged for its placement in a collection. I settled the rights to my estate. I arranged all the legal matters. I even said goodbye to my remaining friends. I wrote a thank you letter to the Danish state and all the private foundations who had supported me throughout my career as an artist and non-philosophical thinker. In these letters, I spoke of the freedom in my life, and how honoured I felt to be part of history, to be present to this moment where a life like mine was possible. I also allowed myself to make a list of suggestions and aspirations for the art world.

4.5.2.4.

In short: I was closing off my life, organising it into my own private totality. It was time to shut my eyes, to dream for the last time of my life lived until now. Imagery of my childhood returns to me: a hot summer day in the green hills north of our farm, the fragrance of elderflower, the bright blue sky stretching infinitely into the horizon. I am a boy. I walk, almost ecstatic with the thought of a seven-week holiday ahead of me. Bliss condenses into one feeling of light within me – a burning whiteness of freedom and joy; a strange illumination within me – as if someone had torched my soul. I am going to be fire.

4.5.3.

The second image of my death arises much more frequently, whenever I am on a plane, ready for takeoff. I feel the push from the aeroplane speeding up across the runway and I close my eyes and think: 'This is it. Now I'm going to go.' I see a massive fireball coming from the front of the aircraft towards me and in a split second it will consume me. I will only be able to let out a small scream before it is all over. I sit there, allowing the same image to rush through my mind, and every time, when we are up in the air, I think: 'I made it. I made it until now. I didn't end my life with *this* flight.' What would be left over? Would anything survive the flames? My diary? My teeth? My body? And I think of the first person entering my studio, opening that door that I open every day, knowing that I am dead and will never return. They will look around, sense the silence, the energy from someone to whom all this made sense

and who had touched everything in the room. Someone will begin a discussion of what to do with my leftovers. Who will keep them, who will preserve them, who will throw them away? Who will write the obituary? What will they say? How will they judge me? And are they even capable of that, in this present moment, because of the sheer weight of *unpublished* material? Nobody knows the total volume of my life; not yet. In a weird sense, I long for this fireball to come crashing through a tunnel of seats. It is my death drive, this inner sense of an inability to go on enduring life, confronting myself with all there is to do, and instead wanting everything to end right now, wanting to be the next in line for the Reaper.

4.5.3.1.

When I read about accidents – sudden deaths – I can not stop thinking: What if it was me? I am somehow envious of the victims' destruction, their unintentional redemption from life. They died and that was it. No time to regret, no time to prepare oneself or say goodbye. A simple flash and out goes the light. At this final point, there would be no excuses left, no time to do things differently, just a simple: that's it.

4.5.4.

I am imagining my own death as looming in the night of *my* future. I think my death as the worst-case scenario. My death will be dark, it will be lonely and it will be in sorrow. I will die with the feeling of being rejected from this world, of not being recognised. But I will die knowing that I attempted to push myself into this world. It might turn out differently, as a death where I am in control; a death with *dignity* that stands in a relation to the life I have lived. I do not know. But I expect the worst, so I am prepared, and if my life turns out differently, I can die with relief, knowing that it did not go as wrong as I expected it to.

 SUMMATIONS:

*'The questioning of Being is an experience of Being in its strangeness. It is then a way of taking up Being. That is why the question of Being – What is Being? – has never been answered. There is no answer to Being.'*¹⁰⁰

(Levinas)

5.01.

There is a being that comes from my simultaneous presence to own, given and final being. I am always embodied and related to a social situation at a point in time. The metaphysical knot cannot be undone and I am condemned to its centre: nothingness. Every human being alive testifies to a violent play with existence within the dimensions of being. For every human, a play with existence consists of different components being active within the dimensions, yet whatever component I attempt to sketch in a phenomenological fashion (how the dimensions take on flesh for a certain individual), the component in its totality will always elude me: I will never grasp its meaning for everyone. Every component is dependent on the perspective from which I view the body, the social and time. Thus, these fields of forces will present themselves differently, to be variously endured by every human being, inscribing themselves into the human existence in front of me in their always singular way. Yet, confronted with what is to be endured, human existence seems to be constantly expanding the limits of endurance: as humans we are pushing the limits of our existence into new territories in order to create new relations to being. But what happens at this limit? How does the limit of *my* endurance arise within the phenomenological field of experience? As a speculative attempt to

understand the grey zone of existence where my limit is pushed to its utmost, I will traverse three different topics: *flooded by being*, *depression* and *suicide*.

5.02.

These last summations point towards aspects of endurance in relation to a human life: how life can turn against me, from being something that is joyous and wonderful to a situation that must be endured and ultimately find an end in suicide. The following is another attempt to answer the guiding question of the investigation: What is the breaking point? The threshold where life is no longer endurable? All the aspects that I have been sketching out in a phenomenological fashion (section 2.– 4.), point towards zones of existence that can pressurise a human being. In the three last sections I will try to map out zones of the unendurable: states of being where the line is crossed, where the subject is pushed to the limit of itself and ultimately ends its own life in suicide. To be flooded by being is to fundamentally lose control over life, to become subject to forces to which I do not belong. To enter the zone of depression is to be engulfed by an emotional state of darkness. To end a life in suicide is to end the unendurable.

5.1. THE UNBEARABLE: FLOODED BY BEING

*'The anonymous current of being invades, submerges every subject, person or thing. [...] Being remains like a field of forces, like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one.'*¹⁰¹
(Emmanuel Levinas)

5.1.1.

During the night, emerging from an interior darkness, a nightmare that seemed real, I sometimes wake up to my own dissolution. I am flooded by an intolerable being. I lie there, surrounded by darkness in a silence without end. This 'nightness' of night – this blackness that arises from lying in bed, looking into nothing – this is a void of its own. Here, the ontological reveals itself as horror: a being that gives itself but with no limits. I am immersed in the opacity of darkness. In this space, my body has no clear boundaries. I cannot *see* my body. I stare into a blackness that is infinite. My only sense of solidity comes from the physical weight of my body being pulled towards the ground, my sense of lying down, staring into the abyss around me. I want to sleep, to evade this state of insomnia, because tiredness pervades my whole being. In this intermediary state of trying to sleep, of wanting to sleep, but being unable to sleep, my mind envisions all kinds of scenarios with myself as participant.¹⁰² I might wander the desert, enter into a cage, be without arms or legs, have just killed someone, hear strange voices, stand on top of mountains or be surrounded by dying refugees. I am again living through a nightmare. It is a state of being on the verge of the unendurable; a being colouring me black and that I do not feel belongs to me or anyone else. I am someone who is reduced to a raw

materialism immanent to my constitution as a human; I am a wreck, destroyed, delivered over to a state *beyond* me.

5.1.2.

In these moments, I fall towards the 'Il y a'¹⁰³ of Levinas, which he describes and discusses in *L'existence à l'existant*. There is. It is an anonymous existence in which I cannot find a foothold and where being becomes a burden. '*We undergo its suffocating embrace like the night, but it does not respond to us.*'¹⁰⁴ It is a state of being where I am no longer able to conquer being, pushing me into a position where I cannot position myself; it is a confrontation with the fact that I, as present within bodily flesh, simply *am*, surrounded by a materiality that simply *is*, but in an anonymity that destroys my world. '*It is no longer a world. What we call the I is itself submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalized, stifled by it.*'¹⁰⁵ My ontic intimacy with the world is destroyed: the ontological appears as the inverted image of burning whiteness. It is a dark night of overwhelming force: I am flooded by a state of being that I cannot control. In this darkness I drown; the surface of my skin becomes a pain-carpet: it wraps me with small spikes stabbing into my flesh. This is a moment where I am flooded by being: my body is permeated by a negative feeling of existence; a feeling of existence where I am confused about who I am, reduced to the pure matter of my body, the pure *nakedness* of my being. '*Here materiality is thickness, coarseness, massiveness, wretchedness.*'¹⁰⁶ Submerged into this 'being in general' that resists any personal form, there is a murmur that comes from the depths of nothingness itself, a sense of a voice that speaks through silence, through the unavoidable presence of 'Il y a', flooding my consciousness.

5.1.3.

'Flooded by being', the dissolution of my consciousness is a mental state where my existence is no longer in control: it is unintentional. I do not seek the flooding of my being, because it is horror. As a metaphor, it has associations with the act of drowning. Here, a consciousness is 'flooded', and in a similar way we can view death as the ultimate flooding of being. Death *flows* through a human body and *washes* a consciousness *away*. To be flooded by being is to enter into a state that is unendurable and must be resolved or else the absolute ending will appear. I can hold my breath below the water surface, but not forever. There is a limit to what my body-self can take, before it surrenders and crashes against the real of the world. The flooding of a human being means that the state of existence has become unendurable. It can no longer exist as a resilience against what has to be endured.

5.1.4.

Driving to the airport in Beijing on a cold February morning in 2005, I noticed a young man screaming on the pavement, his friends holding him back from running onto the street. I looked across to the other side of the road to see if he was shouting at someone. Then I looked back at him and realised why he was screaming. A young girl was lying on the ground.

Without wanting to, I had become the witness to the sudden death of a stranger in a traffic accident. I had no means of visual escape. The dead girl's body, with blood flowing from her head, burned itself as an *image* into my brain. I was flooded by the event, and this flooding was unintentional. It was not the direct intention of my consciousness and there was no enjoyment in this flooding. It was the given that crashed violently upon my screen of consciousness. It was a *saturation* of *my* consciousness, but not a saturated event (Marion).

5.1.5.

As a metaphor for a state of being that overwhelms a body-self, 'flooded by being' derives its image-power from the intuition that we are all floating in one global being in time. This unity or monism (that there is One-World-Time with a multiplicity of durations within it was part of Bergson's idea of duration) is what gives order to our collective temporality – only one human world is spinning in circles around the sun. We are 'on top of time' as the masters of our intentions and the form we give to life. Yet once we are challenged, when being can no longer be controlled or manipulated to our own ends, the water rises above our breathing level, and we are taken in by the violent forces of being. We are forced to endure the duration of time. An example would be a thirty-year-old mother of two, who dies from cancer three months after diagnosis. No modern medical knowledge could stop the tumour from spreading and taking over her body. Here, a consciousness and a family are flooded by being (fighting against the projected time of the prognosis) to the point where they cannot master being any longer. They are all crushed, transformed and transfigured one way or the other by the anonymous force of an aggressive virus.

5.1.6.

When does life change from being lived in joy, comfort and happiness to its opposite: a life of misery, frustration and sorrow? When I am flooded by being: the moment I am still able to live life as an organic unit, but am forced to endure whatever *blast* being sends against me. The flooding is the moment when I am pushed towards the unendurable, but am still able to endure. I feel threatened, insecure and unable to master my relations to the world. Flooding is when I can no longer breathe. The flooding pushes me towards the thought of no longer wanting to endure life, because I can no longer take 'it'.

5.1.6.1.

A physiological reaction to this flooding is *screaming*, *crying* or becoming *speechless*. The scream of pain and fear of death is like a huge knife, stabbing into my ears. The high vibrations and the emotional chord it releases enter my nerves and make me shudder. I am paralysed by the scream, brought to a halt. The scream testifies to a flooding of some kind: a person is being attacked, killed or frightened to the point where the body reacts in its most primordial way.

5.1.6.2.

The crying of another person is the bodily expression of being flooded. I cry because something has happened or is about to happen that makes me unhappy, either regarding my own situation or that of someone close to me. The announcement of a sudden accident with a fatal outcome, or a family member's diagnosis of a deadly illness unleashes my tears. My crying is a convulsive act connected to the totality of my body: my facial expression, the tears that run from my eyes, the position of my contracted body that curls up within itself. As a body-self, I can no longer hold back the tears; they push themselves forward, just as water overflows a dam. A crying body is flooded by a being that crushes its sovereignty, and in some instances, as when the crying is directed towards another, it opens towards a new space of power. My crying can be so overwhelming that the other is forced to respond to my demands. Crying opens up a negative space of transcendence. From being a sign of weakness, my crying becomes a gesture that testifies to the limits of my existence. As a crying being I am naked, because within the totality of my crying there is a truth that I cannot escape. When I cry, I react to a violence that is imposing itself upon me – I am approaching the limit of what I can endure. In crying there is a relief, because it is a threshold towards a new situation where I will have to do something: react to the situation and if possible avoid the danger that is approaching.

5.1.6.3.

Being speechless is when words disappear from my mouth. I simply cannot say anything, because what I am going through does not translate into words. Through my silence I am not trying to master the flooding, but am forced to acknowledge that the event is beyond my comprehension. Something has happened, a blast from being has pulverised my language.

5.1.7.

Being becomes intolerable when a body-self is flooded by it; when it can no longer evade it. The terror of a situation can be such a flooding; the state of chronic insomnia, a panic attack, a lethal illness, PTSD or the sudden death of a family member. Manic depression, where states of being oscillate from grandeur and mania to dark moods and self-hatred; a psychotic state of being where the body-self is haunted by strange delusions, as in schizophrenia where several voices scream within the body-self, where the 'I' no longer knows who it is – these are also floodings of being. 'Flooded by being' does not designate a specific instance – it is a speculative concept describing a mental state of human existence when it is no longer in control of itself and able to master its relations to being.

5.1.7.1.

All the aspects of enduring own, given and final being to which I have attempted to give form in this book can be seen as potential floodings of a body-self. They can be endured, but they can also impose themselves so violently upon a body-self that this body-self is no longer *able to* or *will* endure 'it' – the 'it' being the flooding of a whatever life of an individual in a life-

world. Flooded by being is thus a concept of a state of being *beyond* the limit of being. It is an experience of transgressing a limit of existence, not towards an ecstatic joyful being in the world or a mystical union with a supreme being, but the opposite: the total crushing of an individual; the violent dissolution of a self-controlling ego. It is existence as dread and despair; the destruction of any sense that the future might be better.

5.2. ENDURING DEPRESSION: THE BURN-OUT

*'Depression is the pathological frontier of individualism – the point at which the whole world is eaten up by the self.'*¹⁰⁷
(Ben Jeffery)

5.2.1.

Depression is a psychosomatic state of being that permeates the whole of human existence. It manifests itself on a physiological, psychological and social level. It cuts through the transcendental dimensions of being: own, given and final being. The sense of the body, the social world and temporality are given a new darkness in the state of depression because depression 'compresses' consciousness: one is low, sad, apathetic, experiencing feelings of guilt, worthlessness and hopelessness. Depression is the *basement* of the human psyche. As a psychiatric concept it covers a complex spectrum of possible states of being and syndromes – *major depressive disorder*, *bipolar disorder*, *unipolar disorder*, *seasonal affective disorder* and *post-traumatic stress disorder*, to name a few – with a huge variety of causes for its appearance. Mental health issues are categorised into three broad dimensions – psychotic, affective and personality disorders – yet in reality, face-to-face with the depressed, there are only individual manifestations of depression within the spectrum of affective disorders. As a rule-of-thumb, it is believed that to distinguish depression from a 'sad day', the low mood should last for at least two weeks in combination with other well-defined symptoms and a rejection of life-enhancing activities. Depression is thus a state of being that has a temporal duration, it 'lasts' and it 'evolves', transforming the individual into an-other to himself.

5.2.1.

Depression can strike for a number of reasons: it can be a reaction to life events such as bereavement, sexual abuse, torture, heart attack; it can be a side-effect of medical treatment or abuse of drugs or alcohol (alterations in hormonal and chemical balance); the consequence of social isolation, social discord, losing a job or work-related stress (a reaction to a hostile social environment) or a response to the effects of seasonal variations of light (winter depression), insomnia, lack of physical and sexual activity and incorrect nutrition. Depression represents a wide spectrum of possible positions and it is not always clear where it begins or where it will

end. It can hit you like a wave that comes crashing towards you, flooding you with darkness, or it can arrive as a sad, low mood, a feeling of unhappiness, sorrow and a pervasive sense of meaninglessness. It can become an inner tempest, where the body-self feels lonely, trapped within its own brain, accompanied by low self-esteem and hatred towards that self that feels so black and worthless, as well as a sense of guilt about not being happy with life.

5.2.2.

In this section I will try to think about depression from the perspective of a more recent concept: that of *burn-out*. Especially in Protestant cultures, the idea of burn-out has cast a new angle on depression as a state of being resulting from stress and a skewed work-life balance. Burn-out is a metaphor deriving from the idea of a machine that can no longer run – either because it has been worn down, its parts can no longer be mended, or it has run out of energy. Or it can be likened to a fire that has left only ashes behind. To burn out as a body-self is to be unable to endure the pressure from existing with being. To burn out is to be 'brought down' by the stress of a life committed over many years to the performance of work and social obligations. Burn-out has not replaced depression as a diagnosis, but the use of the term *burn-out* instead of *depression* is more widespread and accepted in cultures with a high work ethic because it testifies to a working subject who has given everything to his employer. Thus it changes the perception of someone who is unable to work into someone who has *over-worked*, thereby implying a semi-heroic aspect.

5.2.2.1.

What is the phenomenological experience of burn-out from a first-person perspective? It is when *I am approaching a limit of what I can endure*. My space of consequences is pushing me down. I am drowning in my own tears. I have committed myself to a world in which I am unable to live. The coordinates of my existence are fencing me in, leaving no space for rest, time off or simply freedom to act. I am caught in a web of expectations, demands and obligations. I have pushed myself into the world for years and now I am done for. In this world where I am constantly stressed, overburdened, always working and never relaxing, I am moving towards a black hole of exhaustion. I crash not as an active participant into the world, but simply onto the ground of my own exhausted body. I am burned out from within: my body is burning from the inside – not like a ball of flames, but like a fire reaching its endpoint. My burn-out is a 'social death', because I am no longer able to perform the social: the energy needed to exist is used up. My burn-out *disperses* me. I am unable to concentrate myself, to contract myself into one single will-force. From where I am lying, my world is covered in the ashes of what used to be the meaning of my life. It has lost its meaning. I become indifferent to it; indifferent to my self *in* it. I simply do not want to live my life anymore. I am uninterested in my life to the point of nausea.

5.2.2.2.

During burn-out there is within me a sudden urge to destroy everything because I can no longer endure it. I cannot stand this life. Not that I want somebody else's life – it is life in general that I cannot take anymore. I know that the grass on the other side has also withered away. The greenery was there, but that was many years ago. I have left that magical world of my childhood with its blissful ignorance and freedom from monetary worries behind me. It doesn't exist anymore. My body, my social world and my age are now different. This world I have chosen for myself where I am a free agent¹⁰⁸ and responsible for my own career and performance, where I have to constantly fight for my freedom against my creditors, is wearing me down to the point where I see an exit plan in the total destruction of *everything*. Is it the nihilistic dimension of burn-out that makes my burn-out a *felt* nothingness *within* me?

5.2.2.3.

Just as when I am watching a film where I can no longer endure what is happening on the screen and walk away, so I want to walk away from my life. I want to walk away into a past life, way back into the past, when I did not yet know what awaited me. I want to regress to a previous state of being, crawl into my mother's womb, get sucked into a warm secluded space of safety and comfort, where there is absolute continuity with being (Bataille).

5.2.2.4.

I dread this dragging of my life into the future, where I am slowly crumbling, ageing, becoming more and more exhausted. Within me is an urge to die, because I do not have the energy to keep going. I no longer have the power to exist: to endure the givenness of being. The given has become this huge black hole into which I am sucked: the space of depression. There are moments when I think about my own absence to the world, and this thought is actually a relief to me. I would be free from the world, and the world would be free from me. So, on different levels I allow this thought to have actual existence as something that is about to happen and that forces me to prepare myself. I have organised my archives so that they are easy to access, and I often think to myself when leaving my studio that this could be the last time I see it. I no longer postpone; I always try to pay all my debts to the past as quickly as possible.

5.2.2.5.

I lie awake in the morning completely exhausted, with a ball of contractions in my stomach. My skin feels as if it is being electrocuted, my brain is aching. I am quiet, with a sad expression in my face. I think to myself: I cannot take it anymore. I am being pushed towards the breaking point of my own existence. The decisions I have made were not false or wrong – I just couldn't do anything else. I was cornered, and I acted on very strong emotions. Everything I do now, everything that gives itself on a daily basis, is the consequence of my decisions. I am to blame. This guilt that haunts my consciousness is the shadow that arises from a move towards a life gone wrong.

5.2.2.6.

My self-diagnosed burn-out produces a longing for redemption, a sudden emergence of a sovereign gesture towards my existence that could save me, release the pressure exercised upon me, such as a powerful invitation, the offer of a new house, a job or the acquisition of my work – anything that would lift me up, fill my life with energy and economic security, affirm my existence as useful, worthwhile and with the possibility of allowing myself a *break* from my pressurised self. I continue my struggle, each day burning inside. Even though I am not qualified to diagnose myself, I know I am ready for the clinic. Or put differently: I would not *mind* going to the clinic.

5.2.2.7.

Part of my burn-out is a longing for an accident to happen that would relieve me from the violence of being, but where I would not be to blame. I want to be relieved, but not with a sense of guilt. It is simply not an option to walk away from everything.

5.2.2.8.

I feel my burn-out as a tiredness from always travelling to the far end of existence. My voyage to the dark side of life did not bring light, it just enhanced the darkness to the point of the unendurable.

5.2.2.9.

Depression is the space of being where I become naked in the face of darkness. Confronted with the totality of being, it reveals itself as contingency. Life could be... and life could not be... I am given over to life as an animal is to a nature that it does not understand. I am a nothing on the inside.

5.2.3.

From a different perspective, my burn-out can be seen as the result of my being a 'bad neo-liberal subject': someone who cannot synchronise himself with his surroundings. I am a bad subject because I sink into a state of being that is coloured by absurdity and apathy: the absence of a cohesive will to perform my life-world within a capitalistic world order. It is the sense that the world of work is no longer meaningful. I look at other people going off to work with apparent happiness, and I look at myself: I do not want to work anymore. Who is to blame? In a neo-liberal society, *I* am to blame, because I have become one with work. My personal identity as a body-self has been merged with my work-identity, making me the person responsible for my burn-out at work. So my burn-out fills me with a sense of guilt about not being able to perform, about not wanting to perform. I made the decision to become an artist; nobody forced me to do this with my life. And here I am, after 18 years of attempting this form of my life, and I no longer want to work and live as an artist. These are the thoughts that haunt me in those bad periods of 'the savage mood' when the black demons are gnawing

at the pillars of my existence, shattering me and making me insecure about what I am and what I want.

5.2.3.1.

Looking back over the years, I believe that a sense of melancholia has always been present in my life. Has my sadness, feeling of isolation, solitude and rejection been, in reality, a recurrent mild depression, which I have been able to hide from those surrounding me? I haven't been diagnosed clinically, but my question is: how far away have I been? How much more am I able to *endure* before I walk that path towards psychiatric treatment? I often return to this question in my daily life, because I wonder if my feelings are in fact normal (I have until now been able to function in the social world) or merely testify to a certain vulnerability (my psychic sensibility¹⁰⁹) that enables me to exist artistically? By the latter, I mean that the ability to think new ideas, to envision images, to be open towards the heterogeneity and the base materialism (Bataille) of the world comes at a certain price.¹¹⁰ Maybe the question should be posited differently: how much more am I able to endure before I crack and could be 'officially' diagnosed with burn-out?

5.2.4.

How can depression be counteracted? What are our means against this 'basement' of the human house of being; against the 'black dog' that can arise after periods of manic creativity? As stated, depression manifests itself on a physiological, psychological and social level and on each level we also find our possibilities of counteracting or curbing depression.¹¹¹ A) On the first level depression can be seen as imbalance within the bio-chemical distribution of hormones and neurological transmitters in the brain (the level of serotonin). Here, our 'natural' means are related to diet and nutrition (omega-3 acids, vegetables), physical exercise (sports) or physical craftsmanship (building things with one's hands), exposure to sunlight (against winter depression) and sexual intercourse (the release of endorphins). The brain can be experimented with and manipulated through the development of anti-depressants (which today is the primary 'weapon' against depression).¹¹² B) On the second level, there is the questions of the psyche, of how I am able to carry out self-therapy or self-diagnosis, and thereby alter my self-perception and the voices within. I can speak differently about my self, I can perceive my actions and emotions in a new way, and thereby bring the depressive mode to a halt. I can act on the symptoms and seek help (psycho-dynamic therapy, cognitive therapy) before the depression gets worse. I can say to myself that things will get better and thus generate hope and meaning in my life. And I can meditate, use the conscious act of relaxing, establishing contact with my body, finding an inner peace and balance.¹¹³ C) On the social level, I can attempt to construct a new work-life-balance, with a clear division between my work-life and private-life, not allowing the former to invade the latter. This means reducing my online-availability through emails, social media, chat forums etc. I can announce beforehand to my employer that after a deadline I will need a break. I can decline all demands to work until I

have recuperated.¹¹⁴ And I can actively seek out the company of others, of friends and family, and thereby avoid the depressive state of loneliness and feelings of isolation. I can dilute myself in states of laughter, co-presence and social ecstasy.

5.2.4.1.

These are some of my means of escaping depression – if I know it will arise after periods of heavy workload, during winter time or other unpreventable times of life. Yet I cannot prepare myself for the natural emotional response arising from the loss of someone very close – a family member or a good friend. The effect of the death of a special-other is like my house collapsing because a room has suddenly disappeared. The other is not outside of me, but within me. The other co-inhabits my interior, and the disappearance of this other leaves a huge black hole of emptiness within me. After the death, I have to rebuild myself, reconstruct my inner architecture and grasp the power of the new emptiness, of what this other *meant*. Depression in this form is *transformative*, because it is powered by death.

5.2.5.

Depression in its pervasive form, when it lasts for months with no recovery in sight, represents the crushing of a life; the draining of meaning from life makes it unendurable. In the space of severe depression, the light of hope can be extinguished. This is dangerous, because without hope there is no belief that the condition will change for the better: it is a flooding by being that ultimately 'drowns' the body-self. As the young journalist suffering from depression for two years wrote in her diary: '*The pain has become excruciating, constant and endless. It exists beyond time, beyond reality, beyond endurance.*'¹¹⁵ One month later, her dead body was found floating in a lake.

5.2.6.1.

If depression in all its possible manifestations is left untreated, unacknowledged and not counteracted through medication, therapy or a change of lifestyle, it becomes a 'toxic environment' from which the decision to commit suicide emerges.¹¹⁶ To endure depression can become unendurable.¹¹⁷ In other words: anyone suffering from severe depression is at high risk of ending his or her life in suicide (it is believed that approximately 50–60% of all suicides had been suffering from depression¹¹⁸).

5.3. BREAKING POINT: SUICIDE

*'The man who has never imagined his own annihilation, who has not anticipated recourse to the rope, the bullet, poison, or the sea, is a degraded galley slave or a worm crawling upon the cosmic carrion. This world can take everything from us, can forbid us everything, but no one has the power to keep us from wiping ourselves out.'*¹¹⁹

(E.M. Cioran)

*'Having acquired the consciousness of our freedom, we are masters of a resolve all the more tempting in that we do not take advantage of it. It makes us endure the days, and, what is more, the nights; we are no longer poor, or crushed by adversity: we possess supreme resources. And even when we never exploit them, when we expire in the usual way, we have had a treasure in our very abandonment: what greater wealth than the suicide each of us bears within himself?'*¹²⁰

(E.M. Cioran)

5.3.1.

Suicide is the point where (I)¹²¹ can no longer endure 'it' (the flooding by being, the space of depression). It is a turning point where (I) decide to resign myself from life in a much more radical manner than in burn-out, where (I) can no longer endure the life (I) am living, and my only point of escape is to terminate this organism that until now (I) have been able to endure. Suicide is a deliberate action against oneself with a *fatal* outcome. *It is the intention to kill oneself and actually succeed in doing so.*¹²² In order to delineate the whole spectrum of what a suicide is, I must go beyond the depth of my own experience (since I have not attempted or committed suicide) and enter into the speculative realm of thinking, thus introducing my 'phenomenological twin' – the (I). It is from this perspective (from the perspective of a phenomenological twin, I-as-another) that suicide will be considered: that is, a voluntary death on which the individual decides in a contemporary secularised world rather than in any religious or social system that demands or encourages suicide. This reduction in perspective is also a limitation of the scope of my speculation. It is not a universal theory of suicide.

5.3.1.1.

Rather, the concept of *Endurance* can be seen as an attempt to supplement the existing discourses on suicide with a new concept in which *suicide as a choice emerges at a threshold of what can be endured*. It is an attempt to develop a different theory of why people commit suicide – and thereby a contribution to the already existing theories that try to explain and understand suicide.¹²³ A recent and influential theory, upon which I have already touched in relation to isolation and burdensomeness, is the *Interpersonal Theory* developed by Thomas Joiner (b.1965), who in *Why People Die by Suicide* (2005) posits that three different circumstances must be in place before a person commits suicide. Firstly, a lack of social belonging and isola-

tion. Secondly, a sense of being a burden to the world. Thirdly, the ability to act against the primary instinct to preserve oneself. Other theories of suicide supplement the interpersonal theory with the common notion of a feeling of failure, depression and low self-esteem. All these aspects I have attempted to think about as components feeding into the concept of endurance and what can make life unendurable. Yet my concept of endurance as an existential trait of human existence opens towards a new understanding of suicide because it views suicide as that point where *a life has become unendurable*. We all have to endure our body, the social world and the time in which we are living, but there is a limit to what we can and will endure. A suicide signifies that a limit within life has been reached that can no longer be endured.

5.3.2.

The other socially instituted forms of suicide analysed in *Le Suicide* (1897) by Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), the father of the modern scientific study of suicide, include the subcategories *egoistic suicide*, *anomic suicide* and *fatalistic suicide*. All three can be viewed in relation to a life that has become unendurable. The egoistic suicide is committed by the isolated individual who lacks connection to society and feels like an outcast. The anomic suicide is committed by an individual whose life lacks meaning in society, and where the possibility of achieving a goal seems impossible (as in economic depression). The fatalistic suicide is committed when an individual refuses to live in oppressive circumstances (as when a prisoner or a slave kills himself) with no chance of escape. A last category, that of *altruistic suicide* I will not take into consideration here (for example, the father who kills himself to save the life of his son; the soldier who voluntarily sacrifices himself in military service; the student who ignites himself as a political protest; the widow who 'voluntarily' kills herself because this is the law; or the suicide attacker connected to social revolution or religious war). The first kind of altruistic suicide is a suicide in the name of love of another, the second is motivated by the political, and the latter are acts of suicides inscribed in totalitarian systems, whether social or religious.¹²⁴

5.3.2.1.

Durkheim believed that suicide was produced by society: that social systems and conditions made individuals commit suicide either through too much integration or through the lack of it. He introduced 'social factors' into the understanding of suicide as a phenomenon because he viewed society as a *functional whole* that had effects upon the individual committing suicide. Suicide as a means of death (the suicide rate of a given society) was then: *'the product of these factors, which is why we must concern ourselves with them. [...] We shall determine the nature of the social causes, the way in which they produce their effects and their relationship with the individual states that accompany different kinds of suicide.'*¹²⁵ (Durkheim).

5.3.2.2.

As a sociologist, Durkheim was the first to carry out an empirical investigation into the number and nature of suicides in the Western world and how they were committed – by

hanging, drowning, poisoning etc. – and thereby laid the groundwork for a scientific attempt to understand the spectrum of suicide. This is the *epidemiological* aspect of suicide: the variation in execution and ‘official’ reasons for suicide among a population. Current statistics show that approximately 844,000 people per year die from suicide worldwide;¹²⁶ that the majority are white elderly men; that people who have attempted suicide are at higher risk of actually committing it later; that after remittance from hospital depressive patients are at the highest risk of committing suicide; that people suffering from mental disorders are at higher risk; that people who have a disposition for impulsive action are at higher risk; that people who suffer from alcohol and drug abuse are at higher risk; that soldiers suffering from PTSD are at higher risk; that the number of suicides among young people is rising; that women attempt suicide more often than men, but do not succeed as often as men. In other words, the scientific approach clarifies the prevalence of suicide, the gender and age aspects, the different risk factors regarding suicide, and the attempt to predict suicide in order to prevent it.¹²⁷ All kinds of data can be extracted from the statistics of suicide, but, as A. Alvarez rightly notes in his famous study of suicide *The Savage God* (1971), something is missed in the scientific literature on suicide, because ‘the scientific gaze’ has a tendency to reduce the desperation and inner turmoil of an individual leading up to suicide to mere statistics. As he says: ‘*All that anguish, the slow tensing of the self to that final, irreversible act, and for what? In order to become a statistic.*’¹²⁸ There is little comfort for the suicidal mind in reading scientific articles about suicide.

5.3.2.3.

I do think that social factors play an important part in the complex of suicide, but they are not the sole reasons or determining factors. It is my proposition here that a suicide happens because *the horizon of existence has become unendurable: a human being is approaching a limit of what can be endured and decides to end a life that has or will become unendurable*. This limit is not universal or the same for all. It depends on how a human being is framed by a specific instantiation of the metaphysical knot: how a body-self, a social-world or a time-death relation is constituted for an individual. Thus entering into the zone of suicide is where endurance as a concept is pushed to its logical endpoint: *suicide is the response to a life that has become unendurable*. As stated, my thinking here is speculative, yet I have had hallucinations of myself committing suicide (seeing myself hanging from that robe, seeing myself jumping of that ridge, in front of that train). So, I have thought about suicide, because as Cioran states, it gives me the power to ‘endure the days’ and has made me more than ‘a worm crawling upon the cosmic carrion’. Thinking about suicide is a supreme resource, a ‘great wealth’, because it testifies to a sovereign freedom that we as humans have: the freedom to kill ourselves. It is a possibility for each one of us and to think about this form of death is thus also to think the most violent truth about human existence. It is an experiment with the thinking of the intolerable.

5.3.3.

Through the potential act of suicide, I am bracketing suicide outside the dimension of final

being, because it is a death (I) *decide* upon. Suicide is not a ‘natural death’ like dying from an illness or a fatal accident. Suicide is an ending that belongs to me, which (I) make intimate to the point of turning it into a *form-event*.¹²⁹ (I) plan, prepare and execute my suicide (even the most impulsive suicide demands some kind of planning and consideration of its effects), because (I) have decided no longer to endure life as it gives itself *to* me and the way life has come to manifest itself *to me*. Suicide is when my body, my social world and my time as a totality can no longer be endured by *me*. And the stressing of ‘me’ is important, because we do not have the same limits of endurance. We do not fall from the same heights in life, and the ground upon which we crash does not have the same hardness.

5.3.3.1.

The act of suicide can be seen as a way of *taking control* over a life that has become uncontrollable or unendurable. ‘*Some kind of minimal freedom – the freedom to die in one’s own way and in one’s own time – has been salvaged from the wreck of all those unwanted necessities.*’¹³⁰ (Alvarez). By giving form to an own death, one asserts one’s will over a totality (‘life’) that has become chaotic, confused or destroyed. Deciding to commit suicide can thus offer relief, because a solution has been found for what seemed insoluble.

5.3.4.

Can we describe a possible ‘path’ towards suicide? In *The Savage God* (1971), Alvarez describes the first stage as ‘the closed world of suicide’.¹³¹ It is the world of deep inner solitude where the final act is prepared in secret. It is a conversion of the mind to the idea of killing oneself, where the argument *against life* is engendered. From the experience of the unendurable emerges the conviction that life is no longer either worth living or possible to endure, as an isolated being, or as a being in bodily pain. Since its logic is to end life, it has a different logic from that which prevails *in* life. It is not rational, according to Alvarez. It is full of superstition and premonitions. It is an obsession, a constant temptation.

5.3.4.1.

An element of courage and resolve is necessary to carry out a suicide, a certain ability and diligence of action. In order to reach that point of courage, several attempts are often made: the attempted suicide is the act of entering into the zone of death in order to accustom the self to the *presence of death*. During the attempt, the self senses the approximation towards death, and then is saved by circumstances (interrupted suicide) or by the sheer *fear* of death: the survival instinct prevails (aborted suicide). The self comes to understand that death is possible: only one small push ahead, nothing to be afraid of. To become ‘suicidal’ or to exhibit ‘suicidal behaviour’ reveals this accustomising to death. It is to allow the *thought* of committing suicide a space within consciousness: to actively consider the possibility, the how, the when and the end. Should (I) leave a note? Will (I) do it in public? Will (I) use sleeping pills? Hang myself? Drown myself? Stab myself? Who will find me?¹³²

5.3.5.

Contemplating my own suicide opens a strange speculative space: *the world without me*. I am aware that I am present right now, sitting in front of the computer, alone in a living room on a dark winter evening. My life-matrix is in order, my family is sleeping, and tomorrow a new day awaits me. Yet, would not everything that is happening right now in this spatial corridor that I have erected be completely different if I no longer existed? If I had killed myself last week, the emotional atmosphere would be devastatingly different: demonstrations of sorrow, preparations for the funeral, letters of condolence, the appearance of family and friends travelling from abroad for the ceremony. Theories and speculations about *why* I decided to kill myself would be circulating within my network of family and friends. Life would certainly be different *for them*.

5.3.5.1.

Speculating upon my *absence* to *this* world, I come to realise that the order of human relations and even of objects would be fundamentally altered. For those nearest to me, what I constitute with my presence charges the emotional landscape with energy, warmth and love. My sudden death will mean the catastrophic transformation of all those who are close to me: a black hole will swallow them and stain their souls for the rest of their lives. And on the level of objects, my presence to the world is the continuous production of new works of art that enter into other people's life-matrix. This would come to a halt, imbuing my existing works with an uncanny atmosphere: the presence of a hand that ultimately was laid upon my body itself. And then there would be the question of what to do with all my belongings: the objects, paintings, drawings, diaries and notes in my studio. Everything would become dispersed, because I am the unifying self behind its current configuration: I pay the rent for the studio and use it as a working space. It has meaning now, but if I was no longer present, that meaning would dissolve.

5.3.6.

Can we, through this investigation into the concept of endurance – and its limit in the act of suicide – reach a point where we can ultimately *understand* the decision to kill oneself? Suicide can be seen as that moment where being can no longer be endured, where (I), as a human being have reached a conclusion regarding that life of mine to be endured: *it shall no longer be endured*. (I), within this body, this suffering, bleeding ego, will no longer tolerate being in its form; and not only not tolerate it, but also not accept being, because being has become unendurable. (I) cannot take it; (I) surrender, but (I) surrender in a way where my being is to be ended in that moment of surrender. From a speculative vantage point, I suspect that such a moment could arise for me if I were paralysed from the neck down, only able to communicate through the movement of my tongue. Here, in a space where my body-self would be almost destroyed (I) believe that after years of living totally paralysed (I) would want to end my life.¹³³ And because (I) would be unable to do it myself, (I) would need help, as in *assisted suicide* (euthanasia).

5.3.6.1.

Reaching this understanding of suicide through the concept of endurance, we are perhaps able to give meaning to it as a human phenomenon. And perhaps we can avoid the stigmatisation and taboos that surround suicide – attaching both to those who attempt and commit suicide, and to those who are left bereaved and in deep sorrow afterwards. But does it also enable us to *predict* and ultimately *prevent* suicide? As mentioned earlier, we already know who is at high risk, and which factors *increase* the risk of suicide. Because suicide represents such a great threat to society, many kinds of public measures have been made in the Western world: reducing access to lethal weapons and poisonous liquids and medicine; installing safety barriers on bridges and viewing points; media guidelines for reporting suicide (so as not to generate an epidemic or produce copycats); policing certain areas that have become attractive or mythical to young people as places to commit suicide; hotlines for suicidal people to talk to someone and get help; follow-ups for depressive patients leaving hospital; the education of health personnel in the public sector regarding suicide, etc. So how can the concept of endurance do any more to help predict and prevent suicide than this long list of measures? First of all, the question of endurance could be directly put to those under great strain, challenged in life, or suffering from depression or other mental health issues: '*Are you able to endure it?*' and '*How long do you think can endure it?*' If the answer to the first question is negative, the person is at high risk and immediate action should be taken. Through the answer to the second question, we can get a sense of whether the limits of what can be endured are being approached, what the self-perceived powers of endurance are within the body-self (how much can be endured). And finally, perhaps a promise could be made between the questioner and the high-risk person: '*Let me know when you can no longer endure it. I will be there for you.*' These are questions asked through the concept of endurance, and perhaps by asking them we can create a bridge of understanding and empathy between he who asks and the person who endures *whatever*.

5.3.6.2.

To completely prevent suicide is impossible, because as Cioran remarks, it will always represent a 'supreme resource' within each individual: the freedom to choose for yourself. The exits are everywhere: '*Each precipice and river, each branch of each tree, every vein in your body will set you free.*'¹³⁴ (Alvarez). Yet in almost every instance, suicide is a tragedy, the endpoint of a life lived in despair and dread at the limit of endurance, when the final decision has been made to endure it no longer. Accepting that we cannot eradicate the act of suicide from the human vocabulary of possible actions to take, we can instead begin to think about the limits of endurance, of what people on a daily basis are enduring – and how we might help those in need, thereby reducing what is to be endured. Those in need are those suffering from depression and other mental health issues; feeling isolated and marginalised in society; traumatised or under great pressure. Wherever people are approaching the limit of their endurance, this is when we should attempt to reduce what is to be endured.

5.3.7.

Albert Camus (1913–1960) wrote in his famous essay ‘Le mythe de sisyphé’ (1945) that: ‘*There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.*’¹³⁵ Throughout the essay, Camus discusses suicide from the perspective of absurdity: suicide is the logical response to a world devoid of meaning. As an answer to suicide being the solution to absurdity, Camus proposes that we must create a meaning for life or kill ourselves. I see the beauty of Camus’ writing, but I do not accept either his assumptions or his conclusions. I do not think the world is absurd: it is a constituted whole of frameworks of meaning that have already been established before I take any reflective distance from them. The world is full of meaning: joy, beauty and ecstasy – but I can be denied all of these possibilities. I can be pulled down by depression, poverty, social isolation, illness and ageing – towards conditions against which I have no defence or resilience. I don’t think the philosophical concept of absurdity leads to suicide (but a depressive feeling of meaninglessness and indifference can). It is the feeling of no longer being able to endure *it* (the ‘it’ being whatever force or condition is imposing itself upon me as a totality, flooding me as a body-self). Simply put, (I) can no longer endure life.

5.3.7.1.

So let me give some other answers to the ‘serious philosophical problem’ of suicide. Reasons for living consist of four intertwined forces: A) the life instinct, B) loving relationships, C) the question of honour, and D) the joy of living. Let us address these. A) Although there is a part of me that would actually like to die (my death drive), I cannot do so. Sometimes I await that sudden accident or the announcement of a deadly sickness, so that I will not have to lay hands on myself – chance or nature will do the job for me. I myself am unable to do it, because I do not have the courage to end it. This knowledge actually gives me comfort, because no matter how many thoughts and hallucinations I have about suicide, I know I am unable to commit it. My inability comes from the fact that I have a very strong *life-instinct*: the self-preservative force that is active within me, and which is much stronger than my urge to destruct, a force that is intertwined with my being-ability and powers of endurance towards the life I am living right now (2017). At this moment, I am able to endure life. B) I have a deep *respect* for those who gave me life, and for those who are giving me life right now through their love. I keep going because I was given life (by my parents) and I am responsible for life (my children). I want to live, because I don’t want to leave my children alone, and I want to watch them grow. I could not forgive myself for their tears, their grief and sorrow over my death from suicide. I could not forgive myself for doing that to all those who love me and those whom I love. I owe it to the life for which I am responsible to resist the call of death. C) There is an element of *honour* in me. I do not want to be remembered as he who committed suicide, as he who didn’t have the strength to live life, to *face* life, to give it a face by being present to it with a body. My body. *So I am facing it*, just like all others who are still alive. The world we call human is a *faced world*, because each day billions of people are standing up, opening their eyes, looking into *their* world: facing it. I simply want to be one of them. I love other people and I enjoy

being with them. D) There is still a very strong part of me that wants not only to survive, but to *thrive*. I am still hungry for life: I want to accomplish things, push myself as a perceptual organism into the world and explore the richness and depth it has in store for me. I am still astonished by the beauty, the joy and greatness of life and I am grateful for the fact that I am here to experience it. Life will one day be over, but not yet. I am not finished with taking in the world, or emptying myself into the world.

6.
AFTERWORD

ENDURANCE

*'If with each word we win a victory over nothingness, it is only the better to endure its reign.'*¹³⁶
(E.M. Cioran)

*'What answer is there to the man who can no longer endure life?'*¹³⁷
(E.M. Cioran)

6.01.

The concept of endurance points towards the fact that every human being as an organism has *survived until now*. Endurance means that every life is a life preserved until now, not yet annihilated by illness, violence, accident or a voluntary death. Every adult life is a life that has learnt to live with it (a life), that has developed some kind of rationality towards the basic relations (the metaphysical knot) and a level of acceptance of more or less hostile conditions. An adult being is a being capable of enduring being by living in a space of consequences that will ultimately wear it down. We are producers of being yet also subjected to being in its most radical sense: *we will be crushed in the end*. Either our vital organs will stop functioning, a fatal cancer will eat us up, or our brains will dissolve. One way or the other, we will all die on a physiological level. But our journey towards this end station of life is experienced very differently depending on our bodily, social and temporal situation in life – of what is to be endured on a daily level. My initial description of a human existence enduring a life on the margins and my later reflections on the negative aspects of our current neo-liberal society are all phenomenological experiences of what a human life today is for a growing number of

people. For some, life is lived on the margin, at the limits of endurance. It does not have to be so. We can reorganise our world through a different distribution of social relations and economic justice (overcoming estrangement), so that life becomes more tolerable, or differently put: more endurable. I hope with these reflections to have given some insights into why we still need to address social inequality, poverty, isolation, stress, the need for recognition and social security. These are all aspects that we as humans can alter through the space of politics.

6.02.

Why have I attempted to think endurance from a non-philosophical perspective? It has been *my way* of enduring being (Cioran), because I want to get *through* this life without giving up, breaking apart or committing suicide. It is *a way of interpreting life*, giving meaning to the fact that I must endure life: the violence of being pressuring me in every dimension to which I am present. I cannot escape my body, social situation or temporality. I will always be present to an own, given and final being that must be endured. I am still alive because I am able to survive the consequences of my own choices and I want to make the *right* decisions *for me*. I have made and I am still making *decisions* regarding the future – it is the way time becomes real *to me* – but the price I pay is that I, like everyone else, must endure my own decisions. I have to live with them and in this living I am slowly being worn down; I can feel it on the inside and see it on the outside.

6.03.

The basic force of endurance as a conceptual event is its revelation of *my powers to exist*. My endurance reveals the force of my body, the consequences of my decisions and how I am able to resist being. The concept of endurance maps out an interiority regarding my knowledge of what I have been through. It designates my *resilience* against the blast of being. Through the knowledge of what I have survived, the hardship I have overcome, the resistance I have fought back, I produce a knowledge of my being-ability: my ability not only to resist being, but also to produce being. My sense of endurance, my knowledge of my powers to exist, is therefore also my path towards the struggle against alienation and subjection. I know I have within me the power needed to make a better world, at least for myself, but maybe also for others. I have again and again rearranged my conditions, being *proactive* regarding the way I organise my life-world. I have the power to go against this neo-liberal hegemony that is challenging me by accelerating the negative aspects of capitalism: making me stressed and forcing me into the space of burn-out. I must endure yet also rebel against this condemnation to the state of endurance, develop a new way of life – a *community of contribution*.

6.04.

I must endure the fact that I am given over to time and the present configuration of forces in the year 2017. I must let it be my time and acknowledge that I am still surviving being: I am still enduring my existence, even though I have not yet completed myself. I must endure

what I know awaits me: the hardship of working and struggling through the day, making ends meet; the pain, loss and sorrow of family and friends whom I know at one point will die. I must endure because I want to survive: I want to arrive at that future point in time where my being will accomplish itself, where I will redeem myself, where my space of consequences will become meaningful *to me*. To think endurance has for me been a kind of mental training: the exercise of thinking not only what is happening to me in this space of consequences, but also what is awaiting me and thereby prepares me for a future given – a given that will give itself to me and a given to which I have given myself over.

6.05.

As a book that has had the function of mental training, *Endurance* has been a secret book: it contains thoughts that fill me with horror, but also give me strength because I know I have thought them myself. They belong to me because as non-philosophy they have appeared in the space in between my physical life and the attempt to produce theoretical knowledge about it. As stated in the foreword, this book is a *topical event* in my life: I have written it out of inner necessity from my position in life over the last couple of years. It has been a sovereign gesture, as Georges Bataille would have seen it: *the attempt to become naked*.

6.06.

It takes energy to live a life to its end: this project of living a life is a commitment. Only he who endures, who keeps going against resistance and opposition will persist in completing the force of his existence. Thinking the space of endurance gives me patience: an inner sense of calm and peace of mind (autarkia). I have committed myself to my life, and it takes endurance to live it, because life is not easy if I want to live it in such a way that I am honest to myself and those surrounding me, that I am not faking life, living it as a caricature. I have decided to disclose myself as a heterogeneous being and I must live with the consequences: I must endure this disclosure of being that I am manifesting (Nietzsche). I must endure being *me*: this body, this fire. To think life from the perspective of endurance is to think the possibility of *authentic* existence anew, because it is to think a human life as a life of consequences, moving towards death, faithfully following that path of existence that has been chosen. Through these words I have been playing a game with nothingness (that my existence is still indeterminate), so as to better endure its reign (Cioran).

- 1 E. M. Cioran: 'Tout ce qui confine au supplice réveille en chacun le psychologue, le curieux, ainsi que l'expérimentateur: on veut voir jusqu'ou on peut aller dans l'intolérable', *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1385 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 189.
- 2 Sigmund Freud, *Reflections upon War and Death in Character and Culture*, pp. 107–133. Quoted from *The Cruelty of Depression*, p. 4.

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- 3 Emmanuel Levinas: 'L'être est essentiellement étranger et nous heurte', *De l'existence a l'existant*, p. 28 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 9.
- 4 In the paragraphs to follow, I will explain my use and understanding of 'non-philosophy' and how it differs from the established philosophical position of François Laurelle, as I did in *Non-Philosophy and Contemporary Art*. See section 2. A. 1.1. Excursus: *François Laurelle and Non-philosophy*, pp. 41–44.
- 5 In *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Martin Heidegger delineates several existentials, that is, the structures that characterize *Dasein*, such as suffering angst, taking care, being practically involved in the world and existing towards death.
- 6 Here I have in mind the tradition of Existentialism inaugurated by the writings of Soren Kierkegaard and later transformed by the German (Heidegger) and French (Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) strands of continental philosophy in the twentieth century. The later philosophers transposed the phenomenological methodology of Edmund Husserl onto the discourse of Existentialism and thereby replaced the religious discourse of Kierkegaard with a modern atheistic outlook. See *Generic Singularity*, 1.A.5. *Raw Phenomenology*, pp. 22–25 for a description of this transformation of Existentialism in the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.
- 7 The concept of 'being-ability' is translated from Heidegger's notion of 'Das Besondere Seinskönnen' in *Sein und Zeit*, § 39. In *Generic Singularity*, 2.A.1. Excursus 1: *Heidegger and Dasein*, pp. 52–55, I develop the concept, and I will use it throughout this text to designate how each own being is able to disclose being through the totality of acquired skills and competences. A being-ability is how we are able to *do* something in this world, and by doing something we also unfold – or disclose – a possible relation to being.

- 8 See my *Non-philosophy and Contemporary Art*, paragraph 2.3.4. p. 50, where I discuss the importance for non-philosophical thinking of the daily encounter with ordinary people. Soren Kierkegaard called interaction with the multitude 'Menneskebadet' (the human bath).
- 9 The large number of people who buy lottery tickets in hope of a sudden redemption from their economic situation reveals an intimate relation between endurance as a state of being and the power of money. Winning a lottery jackpot is a secularised version of instant paradise, bringing relief from the burden and dread of the everyday that must be endured.
- 10 This is a concept developed by Ove Kaj Pedersen in his *Konkurrence Staten* (2011). His main argument is that with the expansion of the EU after 1992 the European nations have entered a new era in which states compete *against* each other through the constant benchmarking of their different performances – whether it concerns the economic output of each individual, the level of education, implementation of digital technologies and so on. The competitive state is the neo-liberal transformation of the social-democratic welfare state.
- 11 There is a widespread belief in the critical discourse of the left that the new working conditions within neo-liberal capitalism are having a negative impact on the psychological well-being of the individual. I am here thinking of the 'progressive' capitalism that has liberated the individual from standardised industrial working conditions in favour of a flexible ever-changing work life promising freedom and self-development, but without the social security of the earlier version. As an example, see Markus Dettmer et al: 'Moderne Zeiten – Ausleihen, befristen, kündigen: Die neue Arbeitswelt', in *Der Spiegel* no. 12 / 22.03.2010, or the book by sociologist Richard Sennet: *The Culture of the New Capitalism*.
- 12 See Jörg Schindler, 'Gegen die Uhr – Die hektische Suche nach einem entschleunigten Leben', *Der Spiegel* no. 36 / 1.9.2014 for a discussion of the negative effects of the acceleration of all processes in a modern contemporary life.
- 13 In his famous lectures on G.W.F. Hegel and *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Alexander Kojève developed this notion of post-history and what was to become of man in this context. See his *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, pp. 427–443, where he sets the philosophical stage for the theatre of the absurd.
- 14 *Generic Singularity*, p. 49.
- 15 *Generic Singularity*, p. 61.
- 16 See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* (1991) and their understanding of the concept as an event within a thought-space: 'The concept is the contour, the configuration, the constellation of an event to come. [...] The philosophical concept does not refer to the lived, by way of compensation, but consists, through its own creation, in setting up an event that surveys [survol] the whole of the lived no less than every state of affairs. Each concept shapes and reshapes the event in its own way. The greatness of a philosophy is measured by the nature of the events to which its concepts summon us or that it enables us to release in concepts.'

- Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, p. 37 / *What is Philosophy?*, pp. 32–34. See *Generic Singularity*, 1.A.2. *Philosophical Activism*, pp. 14–17 for a further discussion of this relation between the creation of events and the plane of immanence.
- 17 In *Generic Singularity* I delineated the dimensions of own, given and final being (pp. 46–289) and will in the following pages explain in more detail their relationship to non-philosophy.
- 18 See *Generic Singularity*, 1.B.1. *The transcendental and the metaphysical knot*, pp. 26–31, for a definition of this concept. In short, it refers to the intertwining of own, given and final being. No human being can exist without simultaneously being a body, socially situated and positioned in time.
- 19 We find the evocation of ‘endurance’ or ‘to endure’ in the writings of E.M. Cioran, but also the fiction of Andrey Platonov. As Tatyana Tolstaya writes in her introduction to *The Fierce and Beautiful World*: ‘Life, existence, being HERE is torment, anguish, albeit a creative, fruitful torment, a heroic anguish. Another key concept is “patience” or “endurance.” One must live and be, one must endure. According to Platonov, one must not only endure grief, sorrow, need, and other forms of unpleasantness. One must endure happiness, love, and pleasure’, p. xvii. More recently, anthropologist Elizabeth A. Povinelli has in her *Economies of Abandonment – Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Capitalism* attempted to place the concept of endurance within a larger critique of late capitalism. As she writes: ‘To what are we committing ourselves if we commit to a freedom that is the undefined and undefinable trajectory of a radical otherwise in our world’s scenes of abandonment? This otherwise may lie in shattering the life-world in which a person finds herself situated, but it also might mean maintaining a life-world under constant threat of being saturated by the rhythms and meanings of another. The conditions of excess always sit side by side with conditions of exhaustion and endurance that put into question the neat capture of substance by capital and other biopolitical projects’, p. 130. The concept of endurance evoked by Povinelli goes in the direction of enduring social worlds of dislocation, poverty and alienation regarding race and culture. My concept of endurance is more existential, as an essential feature of existing as a human being, because we as humans have the ability to endure.
- 20 See Keith Ansell Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual*, pp. 35–42 for a discussion of Bergson’s understanding of duration.
- 21 I have been inspired in this concept by Ben Jeffry’s *Anti-Matter – Michel Houellebecq and Depressive Realism*. The term itself originates from a psychological study made by Alloy and Abramson in 1979. I see some similarities between the insights produced by the fictive characters of Michel Houellebecq and the concept of endurance. In another context it would be interesting to compare what has been called the ‘metaphysical mutation’ in the first paragraph of *Atomised* (1998) – where Houellebecq describes the new paradigm underpinning modern existence – with the concept of endurance. A way of formulating this could be as Ben Jeffry states regarding the realism of Houellebecq: ‘The starkest material truth, after all, seems to be that we are all ultimately alone inside our skin’, p. 15.
- 22 See the introduction to the English translation of *De l’existence à l’existant* by Robert Bernasconi, where he writes: ‘Levinas went to the very heart of Heidegger’s early work by contesting his account of the so-called ontological difference, the distinction between Being and beings. [...] Levinas wanted to show that there is existence without existents, and this, as we shall see, was in order to reopen the question of transcendence’, p. xi. In a different context it would be interesting to explore the connection between ‘There is’ and the development of the nominalist idea of God as seen in the writings of William of Ockham (1285–1347) in the fourteenth century. The sense of a ‘There is’ represents the brute material fact of the world in all its incomprehensible totality as a dark mysterious force that I cannot completely understand. Humans use scientific knowledge as a protective shield against the totality of nature, against this darkness (of God). Throughout history it has been given different names depending on the context. It can be the destructive annihilating force of a deadly bacteria (the Black Death); a deceitful God (Descartes); Das-Ding-An-Sich (Kant); nature as a void (Schelling); The Will – a blind force in organic matter (Schopenhauer); The Will to Power (Nietzsche); aggressions and desires pulsating behind our representations of the world (the Freudian unconscious). I find it helpful to understand the ‘There is’ as a designation of all those phenomena of the world that we cannot understand, control or manipulate at a given point in time (yet our historical evolution is also the accumulation of mastery over nature). In *Generic Singularity*, 1.A.5. *Raw Phenomenology* pp. 22–25 I discuss the development of phenomenology towards this ‘raw being’ – the latter being the name Merleau-Ponty gives to the ‘There is’. In his *L’œil et l’esprit* (1964) he evokes the ‘There is’ several times and calls it the ‘depth of being’ or ‘the obscurity of being’ (pp. 54–56), on the other side of Descartes mental grid of the world. For an interesting account of this ‘Savage God’ (Alvarez) see especially Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (1995).
- 23 The relation between the ontic and the ontological is called the ‘ontological difference’ by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*. The ontic represents the relation between objects and their structure, the daily world in all its givenness (beings). The ontological designates the condition of possibility, of why this configuration of objects is possible at all (Being). One could say that Levinas’ refusal to speak of ‘beings’ / ‘Being’, instead using the terms ‘existents’ / ‘Existence’, is also an effectuation of the ontological difference. For a further discussion of this distinction, see *Generic Singularity*, 1.B.4. *The Relations to Being*, pp. 37–41. See also Jesper Goll: ‘Heidegger og metafysikken’, in *At Læse Heidegger*, pp. 13–18.
- 24 See *Non-philosophy and Contemporary Art* and the section *The Depth of Experience*, pp. 28–67, where I present the origin of non-philosophy in the writings of the late Merleau-Ponty and explain the position and method of being a non-philosopher.
- 25 Merleau-Ponty: ‘Je suis la source absolue’, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p.iii / *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. ix.

26 Merleau-Ponty: ‘*C’est en nous-mêmes que nous trouverons l’unité de la phénoménologie et son vrai sens. La question n’est pas tant de compter les citations que de fixer et d’objectiver cette phénoménologie pour nous*’, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. ii / *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. viii.

27 Here, I am drawing on the works of Georges Bataille (1897–1962) and his thoughts on the sovereign gesture of communication. See Else-Marie Buch Leander, *Bataille og suveræniteten* (2015) and note 33 on the topical event for a further description.

28 I use this concept as developed by Deleuze & Guattari in *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*, where the plane of immanence designates the incision into chaos: the inauguration of an order whereby events of the world are captured through the creation of concepts. To explain the plane of immanence with an image, one can think of the fisherman who goes out to sea with his net. The net is a grid with a certain degree of fineness that captures some fish, but not all organisms within the ocean. The fisherman (the philosopher) throws (the incision) the net (the plane) into the ocean (chaos). He does not catch the whole ocean, but only some parts (concepts) of it. He brings (invents) his own net, which allows him to make something visible (the events) that was previously hidden below the surface. We can thus accept the following: not everything can be thought, yet something can – and this something, however small, is enough, in order to begin thinking for oneself. So to do philosophy is to be active: make that incision, invent those concepts, define them, put them into use in order to enhance the ways of living a life. See *Generic Singularity*, 1.A.2. *Philosophical Activism*, pp. 14–17 for a further discussion of this concept and my use of Deleuze & Guattari’s ideas.

29 In the following I use the ‘transcendental’ as outlined in *Generic Singularity*, 1.B.1. *The Transcendental and the Metaphysical Knot*, pp. 27–31. I write in relation to the Kantian notion of the transcendental (a general *a priori* condition through which things can become objects for our thought): ‘*Own, given and final being are transcendental principles insofar as they allow specific phenomena and structures to become objects for our thought. The transcendental is therefore a set of necessary relations to dimensions of being that together constitute the space of human existence*’, p.30. Where Kant views the scientific condition of understanding the world through the necessity of objects to exist in space and time, I am interested in a model that can allow me to think human existence. The metaphysical knot is a model that is *useful for me*.

30 Maurice Merleau-Ponty: ‘*C’est un fait que je me crois d’abord entouré par mon corps, pris dans le monde, situé ici et maintenant*’, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 47 / *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 43.

31 When, in the Summations of this book, I enter into the space of thinking about suicide from a first-person perspective, this presents itself as a contradiction. Yet I think this is what must be done in order to understand the full scope of endurance as a concept. So to differentiate myself, as an author, from the suicidal subject, I will use (I) when talking from the position of the person who wants to commit suicide. One could tentatively

call this position the ‘phenomenological twin’, as in the doubling of oneself towards the existence of another. The (I) in the latter section does not ‘belong’ or ‘refer’ to me (as the author of this book), but to my ‘phenomenological twin’, myself-as-another, whose mind I attempt to enter into through empathy and imagination.

32 It is important to understand the limitations of these non-philosophical explorations because they only account for what I have encountered and thought about. Each reader must outline what constitutes the depth of his or her own experience. There is an individuality to experience that means we have within ourselves a reservoir of stories, experiences and encounters that constitute our ‘life lived’.

33 I understand the concept of the ‘topical event’ as described by Michael Richardson in his brilliant book on Georges Bataille (1994). He quotes the following passage: ‘*Poetic work is sacred when it is the creation of a topical event, communication felt as a denuding. It is violated of itself, denudation, communication to others of the reason for living, in which this very reason for living is itself displaced*’, p. 112.

p.18 - 29 Introduction

34 E.M. Cioran: ‘*On ne peut éluder l’existence par des explications, on ne peut que la subir*’, *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 622 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 49.

35 See *Generic Singularity*, 3.A.1. *Given Being as a Space and a Life-world*, pp. 125–130, where I discuss in more detail the relationship between degrees 1 and 2 of given being within the intimacy of my life-world.

36 E.M. Cioran: ‘*Subir les conséquences de leurs actes, ou en être préservés, tel est le lot des hommes*’, *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 621 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 48.

37 See Matias Møl Dalgaard, *Kierkegaard og det Protestantiske Selv – Kravet om Autencitet*, for a reading of Kierkegaard’s understanding of authentic existence as that lived in accordance with one’s own will: doing what one wants in the life one has been given.

38 Emmanuel Levinas: ‘*Le fait d’exister comporte une relation par laquelle l’existant fait contrat avec l’existence*’, *De l’existence a l’existant*, p. 37 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 16.

39 The concept of ‘precarious existence’ has been developed by political theorist Isabell Lorey, inspired by the work of Judith Butler (precarious life) and Michel Foucault (in relation to ‘governmental precarization’). See the online article for a further description of her concepts: eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lorey/en. My concept of endurance is a description of what must be endured in a precarious existence. Lorey writes: ‘*This situation of self-precarization is connected to experiences of fear and loss of control, feelings of insecurity through the loss of certainties and safeguards, as well as fear and the experience of failure, social decline and poverty.*’

40 Emmanuel Levinas: ‘*Il existe une lassitude qui est lassitude de tout et de tous, mais surtout lassitude de soi*’, *De l’existence a l’existant*, p. 31 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 11.

41 Søren Kierkegaard: 'Angest er Frihedens Virkelighed som Mulighed for Muligheden', *Begrebet Angst*, vol. 6, p. 136 (my translation).

42 Heidegger evokes the idea of 'running towards the future' as the consequence of a decision. See *Sein und Zeit*, § 62, *Das existentiell eigentliche Ganzseinkönnen des Daseins als vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*, where he writes: 'Sie [die Entschlossenheit] ist eigentlich und ganz, was sie sein kann, nur als vorlaufende Entschlossenheit,' p. 309.

43 It was through reading Michel Foucault (1926–1984) and his interest in Xavier Bichat (1771–1802) that I was led to the writings of this physiologist, who strove to understand the ability to exist. His famous definition of life in *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort*: 'La vie est l'ensemble des fonctions qui résistent à la mort', p. 57, has been of great importance to this study.

44 E.M. Cioran: 'Que faites-vous du matin au soir? – Je me subis', *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1292 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 36.

45 Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) pointed towards this reduction of bodily energy during life. Yet my physical constitution is not altogether fixed according to my position on a time-plane, because I can *train* myself. Through physical activity and healthy nutrition I can enhance my energy level to a certain extent.

46 The question arises whether melancholia as a state of mind can be seen as a mild form of depression that throughout history has characterised the 'artistic mind' as the price paid for access to the heights of creativity. For further reading, see *Melancholie* (2004) by László F. Földényi and *As a Weasel Sucks Eggs* (2008) by Birnbaum & Olsson.

47 E.M. Cioran: 'La certitude qu'il n'y a pas de salut est une forme de salut, elle est même le salut. À partir de là on peut aussi bien organiser sa propre vie que construire une philosophie de l'histoire. L'insoluble comme solution, comme seule issue', *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1390 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 195.

48 I leave out the decision to become a refugee when forced to escape violent conditions and death in one's homeland. The monumental human tragedy that is built from the corpses washing onto beaches around the Mediterranean shores raises a number of questions regarding the nature of the decision and its consequences. The people who are attempting to reach Europe made the decision and knew the risks; yet they did not decide to have their homeland destroyed by civil war or to be invaded by ISIS. They have been forced away from their original habitat because of external violent conditions. Who is responsible for the deaths of the thousands of refugees crossing the ocean? Those who displaced them in the first place by waging war? The Europeans who refuse to open their borders and secure a safe voyage? The smugglers who over-fill the boats so that they capsize? The refugees themselves, who decided to escape over the sea instead of over land? A complex field of intertwining decisions inflects upon this current humanitarian crisis.

p. 30 - 43 Enduring the Body-Self

49 Emmanuel Levinas: 'Etre moi comporte un enchaînement à soi, une impossibilité de s'en défaire. [...] L'enchaînement à soi, c'est l'impossibilité de se défaire de soi-même,' *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 150 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 89.

50 Merleau-Ponty: 'L'existence corporelle qui fuse à travers moi sans ma complicité n'est que l'esquisse d'une véritable présence au monde. Elle en fonde du moins la possibilité, elle établit notre premier pacte avec lui. Je peux bien m'absenter du monde humain et quitter l'existence personnelle, mais ce n'est que pour retrouver dans mon corps la même puissance, cette fois sans nom, par laquelle je suis condamné à l'être', *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 193 / *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 192.

51 See *Generic Singularity*, 2.A.2. *The Monstrous Body*, pp. 58–86, where I circumscribe the space of the body. My concept of the monstrous body attempts to incorporate a larger more multi-faceted understanding of the body as a site of heterogeneous impulses and externalisations. The monstrosity of our body is the boundless space of possibilities of being that resides within us. As Spinoza famously said: 'No one has thus far determined what a body can do', *Ethics*, III, prop. II, p. 87.

52 See Finn Janning, *The Happiness of Burnout – The case of Jeppe Hein*, for an interesting account of how burn-out as an illness is a limit for the individual.

53 E.M. Cioran: 'Mais vivre, c'est s'aveugler sur ses propres dimensions', *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 584 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 6.

54 E.M. Cioran: 'Le malheur constitue la trame de tout ce qui respire', *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 596 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 20.

55 Emmanuel Levinas: 'Il est le mal d'être', *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 28 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 9.

56 See *Generic Singularity*, 4.A.3. *Dispersed Being*, pp. 230–249, where I attempt to circumscribe the existential space of dispersed being. I am dispersed in moments of sleep, in careless actions through stupidity, but also the state of illness disperses me. Dispersion basically means that the unified coherent self is not in control.

57 See *Generic Singularity*, 4.B.1.3. *Negative Space*, pp. 263–64, where I discuss the constant elimination of negative space in the modern world, yet also its haunting quality as that which 'could happen'.

58 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 8. In my edition the translation by Terence Irwin reads differently: 'For we do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive', p. 11.

59 E.M. Cioran: 'Une seule expérience absolue, à propos de n'importe quoi, et vous faites, à vos propres yeux, figure de survivant', *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1393 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 201.

60 Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 69.

- 61 See *Generic Singularity*, 3.B.2. *Systemic Modernity*, pp. 169–196, where I present this concept and its interrelated aspects of the media, democracy, capitalism, nation states and institutions.
- 62 See Mattias Tesfaye, *Kloge Hænder*, which proposes a return to the knowledge and wisdom embedded in the way hands can work materials and machines. He sees as problematic our current tendency to disregard manual labour and good craftsmanship, stating that many of the greatest Danish businesses of today originated from high standards of workmanship.

p. 44 - 63 Enduring the Social-World

- 63 E.M. Cioran: ‘*L’homme, à en croire Hegel, ne sera tout à fait libre «qu’en s’entourant d’un monde entièrement créé par lui».* Mais c’est précisément ce qu’il a fait, et il n’a jamais été aussi enchaîné, aussi esclave que maintenant’, *De l’inconvénient d’être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1357 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 139.
- 64 Emmanuel Levinas: ‘*Le monde, c’est le donné*’, *De l’existence à l’existant*, p. 71 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 38.
- 65 Axel Honneth: ‘*Ringegtsferfaringer [ledsages] altid af affekter, der over for individet vil kunne afslore, at det socialt bliver nægtet visse former for anerkendelse*’, p. 181 / *Kamp om Anerkendelse* (my translation).
- 66 According to Agamben it is the aim of the state to transform the *zoe* of a human – a naked life – into a qualified human life – a *bios* that is able to pursue the good life.
- 67 See G.W.F. Hegel’s famous chapter IV.A., ‘*Selbständigkeit und Unselbständigkeit des Selbstbewusstseins; Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*’, pp. 145–155, in *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), where he develops the theme of the rivalry between master and slave as a fight until death.
- 68 E.M. Cioran: ‘*Nous ne sommes nous-mêmes que par la somme de nos échecs*’, *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 633 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 61.
- 69 E.M. Cioran: ‘*La seule manière de supporter revers après revers est d’aimer l’idée même de revers. Si on y parvient, plus de surprises: on est supérieur à tout ce qui arrive, on est une victime invincible*’, *De l’inconvénient d’être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1385 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 189.
- 70 Jean Améry, *On Suicide*, p. 51.
- 71 Edward Said, ‘*Reflections on Exile*’, in *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*, p. 173.
- 72 Edward Said, ‘*Reflections on Exile*’, in *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*, p. 177.
- 73 See Anthony Vidler’s famous *The Architectural Uncanny* for a brilliant introduction to this theme in relation to space, home and architecture.
- 74 See Chapter Four of *Past and Present*, ‘*Captains of Industry*’: www.online-literature.com/thomas-carlyle/past-and-present/42/.
- 75 See *Generic Singularity*, 3.B.3.3. *Community of Contribution*, pp. 201–204, where I sketch the characteristics of this fundamental ecstasy of community. As part of my

non-philosophical project the next book to be written will be a larger theoretical framework regarding a *Community of Contribution*.

- 76 Sociologist Erving Goffmann has touched upon this theme in his writings, see *Stigma* (1963).
- 77 See *Generic Singularity*, 4.A.3.4. *Solitude*, pp. 239–241, where I briefly discuss these different aspects of solitude.
- 78 Those lists entitled ‘*7 Places to visit before you die*’, ‘*50 films to watch before you die*’ or ‘*100 books to read before you die*’ are attempts to address this aspect of metaphysical solitude from a pragmatic perspective. I might have the desire to travel the whole world, watch all films and read all books, but this is physically impossible. Through the reduction to a limited selection that can realistically be accomplished, the infinite amount of time that would be needed to do everything is solved. By fulfilling the demands of the list of ‘what to do’, I experience a sense of overcoming this temporal aspect of metaphysical solitude.
- 79 In the chapter on suicide I will discuss in more depth the interpersonal theory of Thomas Joiner presented in his book *Why People Die By Suicide*.
- 80 See Joiner, chapter 3, *The Desire for Death*, pp. 94–137, where he discusses the different psychological aspects of belonging and isolation.
- 81 Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*, p. 101.
- 82 See *Generic Singularity*, 3.A.1.5. *Internal co-habitation and the other*, pp. 149–152 for further elaboration of this concept.
- 83 I will sketch the outlines of Durkheim’s theory of suicide in the chapter on suicide.

p. 64 - 79 Enduring Time-Death

- 84 Martin Heidegger: ‘*Das eigentliche Sein zum Tode, das heißt die Endlichkeit der Zeitlichkeit, ist der verborgene Grund der Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins*’, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 386 (my translation).
- 85 Martin Heidegger: ‘*Das Sterben muß jedes Dasein jeweilig selbst auf sich nehmen. Der Tod ist, sofern er »ist«, wesensmäßig je der meine*’, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 240 / *Being and Time*, p. 284 (translation slightly modified).
- 86 E.M. Cioran: ‘*L’ennui est l’écho en nous du temps qui se déchire... la révélation du vide, le tarissement de ce délire qui soutient – ou invente – la vie*’, *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 591 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 14.
- 87 In his deeply interesting book *A Mood Apart*, Peter C. Whybrow intertwines psychology, physiology and medical knowledge in order to understand the complex of depression as a mood disorder. My thoughts on stress and adaptation are inspired by the chapter ‘*Of Human Bondage – Stress, Vulnerability, and the Feeling of Control*’, pp. 169–194. The chapter also presents detailed descriptions of the different flow of hormones that interact during stress and how they influence the brain.

88 See 'Generation Burnout', *Focus*, 37/2011, pp. 76–90. The description of the physiological alterations of the body during stress leading to the burn-out is on p. 79.

89 See *Generic Singularity*, 4.A.2.4.1. *Present absence*, pp. 228–229.

90 E.M. Cioran: 'L'être véritablement seul n'est pas celui qui est abandonné par les hommes, mais celui qui souffre au milieu d'eux, qui traîne son désert dans les foires et déploie ses talents de lépreux souriant, de comédien de l'irréparable', *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 616 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 42.

91 E.M. Cioran: 'Dire que tant et tant ont réussi à mourir', *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1330 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 96.

92 See Jacques Hassoun, *The Cruelty of Depression*, where he discusses the theme of depression in relation to the Freudian tradition.

93 E.M. Cioran: 'Un pauvre type qui sent le temps, que en est victime, qui en crève, qui n'éprouve rien d'autre, qui est temps à chaque instant, connaît ce qu'un métaphysicien ou un poète ne devine qu'à la faveur d'un effondrement ou d'un miracle', *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1393 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 202.

94 E.M. Cioran: 'L'appétit de destruction est si ancré en nous, que personne n'arrive à l'extirper. Il fait partie de la constitution de chacun, le fond de l'être même étant certainement démoniaque', *De l'inconvénient d'être né*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 1355 / *The Trouble With Being Born*, p. 137.

95 Sigmund Freud, 'Reflections upon War and Death', in *Character and Culture*, pp. 107–133. Quoted from *The Cruelty of Depression* by Jacques Hassoun, p. 4.

96 See the introduction to the Danish translation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which discusses in detail the transformation of the Freudian model of the psyche during the period 1910–1920. With his theory of the death drive Freud wished to explain three main aspects: 1) that there is in all organic life a tendency towards the dissolution of self; 2) that there is also a tendency towards relaxation or stress relief; 3) that the death drive explains primary masochism and its manifestation in self destruction and lust for pain. For another description of Freud's theory of the death drive as a primary masochism, see Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun, The Death Drive as Primary Inscription of Discontinuity*, pp. 16–18, where she relates it to her concept of 'narcissistic melancholia'.

97 Throughout my formative years, and also my professional life as an artist, the act of destruction has been central to my activities. From the act of burning all my drawings from my childhood, to the destruction of my student work, to the act of painting over my 'bad' work, destruction is an engine in my creative practice. Recently I have begun to use the process of destruction through fire in my art work. In the summer of 2016 I made a 'Burning Dog' – a 3m-high dog constructed out of cardboard boxes, placed on a raft and burnt to ashes to mark the ending of the festival 'Aeroe Dog Days', and in January 2017 I burnt my work, a huge bird's nest, for the exhibition commemorating Emil West Hertz at Gallery Susanne Ottensen. To destroy is basically to liberate, and from one perspective the history of modernity can be seen as a simultaneous process of destruction of the past in order to liberate a new man.

98 I have, on at least two occasions, been inches away from being hit by a vehicle (a bus in Copenhagen and a tram in Berlin). In both instances, in the hours afterwards I was subject to a strange sensation. I perceived the world, but not with me in it. I felt like a ghost, like someone who was not supposed to be there. I listened to conversations like an invisible bystander, thinking to myself, that in this moment these people were not aware that I had actually died.

99 See Gertrud Sandqvist, *Death Drive – an introduction*, in *Øjeblikket*, vol. 10, 2010, pp. 8–17, where she gives a short overview of the death drive in relation to art and film.

p. 80 - 99 Summations

100 Emmanuel Levinas: 'La question d'être est l'expérience même de l'être dans son étrangeté. Elle est donc une manière de l'assumer. C'est pourquoi la question de l'être: qu'est-ce que l'être? n'a jamais comporté de réponse. L'être est sans réponse', *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 28 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 9.

101 Emmanuel Levinas: 'Le courant anonyme de l'être envahit submerge tout sujet, personne ou chose. [...] L'être demeure comme un champ de force, comme une lourde ambiance n'appartenant à personne', *De l'existence à l'existant*, pp. 9495 / *Existence and Existents*, pp. 52–53.

102 In Plato's (429–347BC) *The Republic* (380BC), we find a similar description of the 'unnecessary pleasures' and 'desires that are lawless and violent' that take place in the mind that awakens at night: 'The sort that wake while we sleep, when the reasonable and humane part of us is asleep and its control relaxed, and our fierce bestial nature, full of food and drink, rouses itself and has its fling and tries to secure its own kind of satisfaction. As you know, there's nothing too bad for it and it's completely lost to all sense and shame. It doesn't shrink from attempting intercourse (as it supposes) with a mother or anyone else, man, beast or god, or from murder or eating forbidden food. There is, in fact, no folly nor shamelessness it will not commit', *The Republic*, Book 9, 571d, p. 331.

103 Levinas developed the concept of 'Il y a' as a critique of Heidegger's understanding of Being. It refers to a state of being trapped within a space of darkness. As mentioned earlier, Levinas wrote *L'existence à l'existant* during his imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp between 1940–1945. One can assume that the 'il y a' describes the experience of waking up in the middle of night, realising that one cannot escape the horror of the concentration camp. 'Il y a' is thus not the ecstatic 'taking up of being in self-transcendence' as Heidegger would put it, but a space of nothingness that opens me directly to the other (who is also trapped). The writings of Primo Levi describing his survival of the Holocaust and what was to be endured as a prisoner gives a terrifying insight into this state of being.

104 Emmanuel Levinas: 'Nous subissons son étreinte étouffante comme la nuit, mais il ne répond pas', *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 28 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 9.

- 105 Emmanuel Levinas: 'Il n'est plus monde. Ce qu'on appelle le moi, est, lui-même, submergé par la nuit, envahi, dépersonnalisé, étouffé par elle', *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 95 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 53.
- 106 Emmanuel Levinas: 'C'est l'épais, le grossier, le massif, le misérable', *De l'existence à l'existant*, p. 91 / *Existence and Existents*, p. 51.
- 107 Ben Jeffery, *Anti-Matter*, p. 54.
- 108 A recent study by the Centre for Labour Market Research (CARMA) at Aalborg University reveals the high level of depression and stress syndromes among independent entrepreneurs. See: <http://vbn.aau.dk/en/projects/reducing-precarious-work-in-europe-through-social-dialogue> (40c64f4d-ebe2-4f93-9430-e674fb6d25dd).html
- 109 In *L'oeil et l'esprit* (1964), Merleau-Ponty evokes the notion of the painter as someone who lives in a world of fascination because his body is able to produce traces that are specific to him (his own body reveals gestural signs unknown even to himself). According to Merleau-Ponty this is because the painter 'does not have the same lacks as others' (*Le peintre vit dans la fascination. Ses actions les plus propres – ces gestes, ces tracés dont il est seul capable, et qui seront pour les autres révélation, parce qu'ils n'ont pas les mêmes manques que lui*', p. 31). Could the psychic sensibility of an artist be a lack (not in a Lacanian sense of desire-as-lack) that makes him at once vulnerable to the world and to himself? His filtering is different, his moods are different, his patterns of response are different.
- 110 Kay Redfield Jamison has in *Touched With Fire – Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (1993) attempted to create a conceptual framework for the relationship between artistic being and psychic disturbance – though she is well aware of the dangers that such a posited relationship entails. With all the necessary hesitation, I still think there is some truth to the idea that moods play a role: 'in igniting thought, changing perceptions, creating chaos, forcing order upon that chaos, and enabling transformation', p. 5.
- 111 Over the years, I have come to accept the relationship between my artistic output and the mood swings that accompany the process of producing art. After meeting a deadline for an exhibition I feel empty and can no longer take any joy in painting. So as a kind of 'depression management' I have found a new working structure. After a deadline, I rent out my studio so that I do not feel obliged to go there and paint when I do not want to. I allow myself time off from painterly work, and do other things, such as hiking abroad, reading and writing, making watercolours of nature and other relaxing activities. This depression management can be seen as an acceptance of my own psychic sensibility: that I have limits to what I can endure, and in order to remain mentally healthy I must protect myself. Self-protection is part of a self-governing mentality or a use of self-technologies (Foucault) in order to remain true to my primary vocation as a visual artist. It is a way of dealing with the shifts in my moods, allowing myself to recuperate, and to avoid a total breakdown. If I were to attempt any kind of self diagnosis, I would say that I have some symptoms of 'cyclothymia', a mild version of hypomania, including: 'Periods of mental confusion and apathy, alternating with periods of sharpened and

- creative thinking', as described in Jamison in *Touched With Fire*, p. 264. In *A Mood Apart*, Peter C. Whybrow writes that 'Cyclothymia [...] expresses itself in a continuous oscillation between unbridled optimism and crushing pessimism', p.108.
- 112 From the perspective of the medical sciences, depression is an illness that originates in the brain due to biochemical disturbances in the endocrine system and especially of the level of serotonin. With the development of SSRI-medicine, also known as anti-depressants, depression can be cured if treated properly and at an early stage. Even though regulation of serotonin levels can be achieved, many unknown factors still surround the complex of depression. Why does not medication have an impact on all patients? Why does depression return? Recent investigation suggests that a number of other factors play a part in recovery from depression. Firstly, the sensitivity of the patient (each individual has different levels of resilience against the challenges and emotional factors that can trigger depression). Secondly, social factors, from stress to recognition of the individual to nutrition and social networks. Thirdly, events in the past play a part, because traumatic experiences of loss, lack of trust, sexual abuse, violence etc. can be re-triggered by certain events. Thus it seems that depression occurs when a number of unfortunate conditions appear at the same time and push the individual into the space of depression.
- 113 See Jörg Blech: 'Heilen mit dem Geist', *Der Spiegel* nr. 21/18.5.2013, an article that presents neuro-scientific research on the positive and healing effects of meditation upon the brain and nerve cells.
- 114 See Alexander Neubacker: 'Neustart – Wege aus der Burnout-Falle', *Der Spiegel* nr. 30 / 25.07.2011, where he describes the efforts of German companies to protect their employees from burn-out.
- 115 Quoted from Kay Redfield Jameson, *Night Falls Fast*, p. 96.
- 116 See Andrew Solomon, *The Noonday Demon – An anatomy of depression*, chapter VII, where he discusses the many aspects of suicide in relation to depression.
- 117 See Christoph Biermann et al.: 'Er hielt sich nicht mehr aus', *Der Spiegel* nr. 47/2009, an article on the suicide of Robert Enke in 2009. Because he was a famous and cherished football player, his suicide spurred a nationwide debate on the taboo of depression within German football culture.
- 118 As Eve K. Moscicki states in 'Suicidal Behaviors Among Adults' in *The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury: 'Mood disorders, principally major depression and bipolar disorder, are associated with approximately 50% to 60% of suicide fatalities among adult men and women'*, p. 97.
- 119 E.M. Cioran: 'Celui qui n'a jamais conçu sa propre annulation, qui n'a pas pressenti le recours à la corde, à la balle, au poison ou à la mer, est un forçat avili ou un ver rampant sur la charogne cosmique. Ce monde peut tout nous prendre, peut tout nous interdire, mais il n'est du pouvoir de personne de nous empêcher de nous abolir', *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 613 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 38.

- 120 E.M. Cioran: ‘Ayant acquis la conscience de notre liberté, nous sommes maîtres d’une résolution d’autant plus alléchante que nous ne la mettons pas à profit. Elle nous fait endurer les jours et, plus enocre, les nuits; nous ne sommes plus pauvres, ni écrasés par l’adversité: nous disposons de ressources suprêmes. Et lors même que nous ne les exploiterions jamais, et que nous finirions dans l’expiration traditionnelle, nous aurions eu un trésor dans nos abandons: est-il plus grande richesse que le suicide que chacun porte en soi?’, *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 613 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 39.
- 121 My use of the pronoun (I) in brackets in this section must here be understood to represent the perspective of the subject considering, intending or opting for suicide. Thus (I) refers to the consciousness of the subject who is about to commit suicide (not the author of this book). See note 31, where I discuss the idea of ‘phenomenological twin’ in order to enter into the consciousness of a suicidal mind.
- 122 See Kelly Posner et al.: ‘The Classification of Suicidal Behavior’, *The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury*, pp. 7–22 for a more detailed differentiation of the necessary conditions surrounding suicide and different categories of outcome, such as actual suicide, attempted suicide attempt, interrupted suicide, self-interrupted/aborted suicide and preparatory acts of behaviour, as well as self-injury where suicide is not the intention. See pp. 12–13 for a diagram of the various positions.
- 123 For an overview of theories of suicide, see Edward A. Selby et al.: ‘Comprehensive Theories of Suicidal Behaviors’, *The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury*, pp. 286–307. Here, a number of theories are presented and discussed, such as biological theories, sociological theory, hopelessness theory, psychache theory, escape theory, emotion dysregulation theory and interpersonal theory.
- 124 See Ian Hacking ‘The Suicide Weapon’ (Selvmordsvåbnet), in *Teknologi og Virkelighed*, pp. 155–169, where he analyses the use of the suicide bomber in asymmetrical warfare practised in the Middle East, by the Tamil Tigers and the Black Widows of Chechnya. According to Hacking, this form of suicide is not related to any Western idea of killing oneself because of despair, depression or dread of life, but is inscribed in a religious belief system related to martyrdom and revenge.
- 125 Emile Durkheim, *On Suicide*, p. 29.
- 126 See Eve K. Moscicki: ‘Suicidal Behaviors Among Adults’, *The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury*, p. 82, where she presents an overview of the scientific knowledge regarding suicide worldwide. The following list of those who are at higher risk of committing suicide are from her article.
- 127 For a recent survey of all the scientific data on epidemiological aspects, see *Suicide Research*, volume 6, from the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention.
- 128 A. Alvarez, *The Savage God*, p. 116.
- 129 See *Generic Singularity*, 4.A.2.3.2. *Form-event*, pp. 221–224, where I discuss the relationship between the event and the form we actively give things that we want to happen.
- 130 A. Alvarez, *The Savage God*, p. 107.

- 131 See Alvarez, *The Savage God*, part 3, pp. 95–162, where he discusses the different aspects of this closed world leading to the act of suicide.
- 132 My friend Peter Bo Andersen (b. 1978) committed suicide in November 2009 by drowning himself at Amager Strandpark in Copenhagen. He left a note apparently stating (I have never seen it) that he ‘had to kill the demon within’. Perhaps his state of being leading up to the decision to commit suicide comes close to what Alvarez describes as follows: ‘On a more sophisticated level, a man may take his own life because he feels the destructive elements inside him are no longer to be borne; so he sheds them at the expense of the guilt and confusion of his survivors’, p. 129. I often think of Peter and try to imagine what state of horror he must have been in – both in order to decide to commit the act and during the drowning. Was there a moment, a sudden flash, when he regretted his action, when he wondered if he could have destroyed the ‘demon within’ through psychotherapy and medication without destroying himself, when he suffered the angst of knowing it was too late? Did he scream? Or was it a passive, solemn drowning, conducted in silence, with a clear determination throughout?
- 133 In September 2005, the rugby player Daniel James attended my wedding in Copenhagen, as a friend of a British relative of mine, because they were on their way to Eastern Europe on an adventure. It was with great sadness that I learned that in 2007 he had been injured in a rugby training session, resulting in paralysis from the neck down. In October 2008, together with his parents, he went to Berne to seek assisted suicide at the Dignitas clinic. Before that, he had made several suicide attempts. In his case – as a young, strong and talented athlete – I respect his decision, because as he stated, his body had become a prison, filling him each day with a fear and loathing of existence. Not all paralysed people decide to end their life, it is a question of how you interpret your situation, and in Daniel’s case, he didn’t want to live like that, enduring that body of his. Without knowing what it is like to be in that situation, I imagine that in that predicament I would probably choose the same solution. See the article “‘He wasn’t prepared to live a second class life’ – why injured rugby star went to Switzerland to die”, *The Guardian*, 18 October 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/oct/18/11>
- 134 Quoted from A. Alvarez, *The Savage God*, p. 291.
- 135 Albert Camus: ‘Il n’y a qu’un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux : c’est le suicide’, ‘Le mythe de sisyphus’, p. 17 / *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays*, p. 3.

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- 136 E.M. Cioran: ‘Si par chaque mot nous remportons une victoire sur le néant, ce n’est que pour mieux en subir l’empire’, *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 594 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 17.
- 137 E.M. Cioran: ‘À celui qui ne peut plus supporter la vie, que répondre?’, *Précis de décomposition*, in *Oeuvres*, p. 614 / *A Short History of Decay*, p. 39.

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