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THE ANETHICS OF ENDURANCE:

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‘I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.’

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I trace examples of figures of endurance across the writing of Samuel Beckett, Agota Kristof and J.M. Coetzee. These figures persevere in survival even when they lack a purpose for endurance, such that survival itself becomes an ethical maxim. I explore endurance in literary, philosophical, and ethical terms as a force which enables their characters to continue. I introduce and theorise the term ‘anethics’ as a modality of ethics founded on ‘withholding assent’ and ‘detached attachment’, and the relationship between the corporeal and incorporeal. I argue that their writing opens a terrain of encounter in which singularities co-exist in their difference and autonomy.

This study of the anethics of endurance privileges the corporeal. It establishes endurance as a non-appropriative capacity of bodies to affect and be affected, and it adopts as its premises the Stoic notion of a body as consisting of activity, and in relationship to the incorporeality of utterance (the *lekta*), and the Spinozistic *conatus* as the desire to persevere. I argue that the authors offer a unique way of understanding endurance, even when figures are facing death or disappearance, violence, or ontological impotence. Beckett’s immobilised and impaired bodies often coincide with the failure of utterance, as anethics of endurance materialises as a capacity to withhold assent, yet to ‘go on’. In Kristof’s *The Notebook*, the main characters exercise self-practices of deliberate non-responsivity. Coetzee further expands the concept of anethics in characters who are committed to withholding assent to mastery.

These authors’ literary dramatizations of endurance and collaborative acts of vulnerability dismantle structures of subjugation and mastery; they generate new modes of intersubjectivity, transformative becoming, persistence in bare life, and self-creation and self-erasure. Perseverance, withholding assent, and detached attachment thus constitute the foundations for an anethics of endurance.

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Introduction

Prologue: Literature, Philosophy, Ethics.

In response to Gabriel D'Aubardède, Samuel Beckett once remarked: 'I wouldn't have any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms' (Graver and Federman, 1979, p. 240). Yet Beckett's work demonstrates an extensive knowledge of philosophy and psychology, and despite his claims of lack of ability or interest in philosophical knowledge, Beckett was in fact exceptionally well-read in the history of Western philosophy, starting from the pre-Socratics and well into the nineteenth century. *Samuel Beckett's 'Philosophy Notes'* (Matthews, Feldman and Addyman, 2020) give us a comprehensive insight into his encyclopaedic and systematic approach to philosophy. Beckett compiled and organized these notes into more than five hundred pages, written mostly in the period between 1932 and 1938. Hardly evidence of lack of interest or knowledge, Beckett referenced these notes over his entire writing career, returning to the ideas, phrases and direct quotes from canonical philosophers, as well as lesser-known thinkers¹. Among them were the pre-Socratics, Aristotle and Plato, the Stoics, Descartes and Geulincx, Spinoza, Berkeley, Leibniz, Hume, Kant and Hegel. (The notes, which were discovered in a trunk in his basement after his death, do not include the important philosophers of the twentieth century that Beckett discovered later, most notably Bergson, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty). Also worth mentioning are his notes and his extensive knowledge on psychology and psychiatry, including Alfred Adler and Carl Jung, as well as his intense therapy sessions with Wilfred Bion in London². Indeed, Beckett's work is brimming with direct and indirect philosophical

¹ According to the *Notes*, the most valuable source for his work was the acclaimed *A History of Philosophy* by Wilhelm Windelband, a neo-Kantian classic which every philosophy student is familiar with. His other two main sources were Archibald B. D. Alexander's *Short History of Philosophy* and John Burnet's texts on Greek philosophy.

² Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon have been conducting expansive research on Beckett's accumulation of ideas and thoughts, which originate in other schools of thought. A great number of materials can be found on their Beckettarchive.org, in their book *Samuel Beckett's Library*, as well as in the book series *Elements of Beckett Studies* and *Journal of Beckett Studies*.

references, but when pressed by D'Auberède, he again refuses to acknowledge their origin:

'Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?'

'I never read philosophers.'

'Why not?'

'I never understand anything they write' (Graver and Federman, 1979, p. 239, 240).

Apart from his vehement denials of philosophical influences, his method also veers away from the Joycean method of hyper-referentiality; instead of Joyce's omniscience and omnipotence, Beckett adopts impotence. Rather than directly referencing or translating philosophy into fiction, Beckett allows the ideas and concepts to incite his own thinking and the creative process of his writing. Therefore, any philosophical provenance is considered unintentional, incidental and indirect, yet is palpable and insistent.

Likewise, J.M. Coetzee's keen and early interest in philosophical writing is suggested in a picture of his bookshelves³ from circa 1956 (when he was only 16 years old). Similarly to Beckett, Coetzee does not directly attribute any of his writing to specific philosophical sources and influences, yet his novels, as well as the content of the bookshelf, clearly indicate his familiarity, if not systematic study of philosophy. Among the authors we find on the shelf are Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Pascal, Rousseau and Kant, a list of philosophers not unlike those in Beckett's notes. And although Coetzee does not seem to have produced as comprehensive collection of notes on philosophy comparable to Beckett's, his writing demonstrates a familiarity with many philosophical concepts. This, as I will suggest in the third chapter, is perhaps most evident in relation to concepts from the Stoics and Spinoza.

Having finished school at the age of eighteen, Agota Kristof⁴ never pursued further education and, as far as we know, did not seek philosophical knowledge or

³ The list of the books on this shelf was generously provided to me by Hermann Wittenberg.

⁴ Born in 1935 in a small Hungarian town close to the border with Austria, Kristof left her homeland during the Soviet invasion in 1956. With a four-month-old daughter in her arms, she was following her then husband, a history teacher whose political views

theoretical insight to expand the scope of her writing. When asked about the provenance of her writing, she suggests that she only wants to write down her childhood memories. But the tenacity with which *The Notebook's* twins endure amidst the harrowing circumstances of war, abandonment and deprivation, enables us to recognise in them a tremendous fortitude of survival, a strength to continue to live even when their being seemingly verges on non-being. As such, if without direct philosophical ancestry, Kristof's twins nonetheless provide ontological coordinates and conceptual personae to my philosophical exploration into an ethics of endurance.

Across the dissertation, I do not utilize philosophy as an apparatus which enables a more exhaustive or precise understanding of the works of Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee. Their fictional and dramatic writing is not lacking in the discernment with which it reveals the ontological complexities of human experience, its ties to the world, or the intimacies of the experience of being. Their work diagrams the inwardness as well as the worldliness of what it means to be (in)human, as their texts dramatize a living ethical thought. But philosophy can assist us in deciphering certain structures of thought that are at play in the works of the three authors, as well as specific concepts that are shared among them in the way they approach endurance, encounters with others, striving in existence or attempting to end it, and the conditions and impossibility of language and utterance. In such a way, philosophy unfolds a different vision of the literary expressions of experience.

Therefore, this dissertation examines in philosophical terms how we can think of an ethics of endurance through selected works of Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee. These three authors differ in the historical time of their writing, in their style, as well as in the types (or lack of) narratives they employ. Yet within a variety of registers, they all depict characters with a common desire to persevere. As they struggle to endure, these characters are often physically impaired or immobile, their worlds confined, and their

put his life in danger. She eventually settled in the Swiss town of Neuchâtel where she remained until her death in 2011. A writer from an early age, but having arrived with no knowledge of French, Kristof spent her first years in Switzerland as a manual factory worker, learning the language until she felt confident enough to start writing. Her first novel in French, *The Notebook*, was published in 1986, followed by the other two books of the trilogy, *The Proof* (1988) and *The Third Lie* (1991). She published four other, shorter works of fiction, as well as two plays, and although critically recognized, none came close to the impact and recognition of *The Notebook* (which has been translated into over forty languages).

interactions demanding. Here, my attention lies less on what happens to them and their relationships, and more on the question of how to continue despite what happens, as it happens, and on the process of continuation, as well as the changes that occur. I contend that ethical subjectivity emerges from the movements of this perseverance, and it is only through these motions that subjectivity ultimately becomes legible. Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee share a common interest in relationships that are formed with other humans, animals, or non-human beings, and which are conditioned, dependent, or constitutive of the practice of endurance. Their characters, even when alone, reveal themselves as always ontologically entwined with others, affected by them as they create themselves, and affecting them as they shape or erase themselves. The disposition of their characters to the events of encounters with others nonetheless retain a degree of distance. This specific position, which I call ‘detached attachment’ enables them to form a connection while remaining singular, and authorises an ethical position of equal, inter-dependent differences wherein one refuses forms of mastery to an other.

Hence, in the main three chapters, I theorise this ethical position of detached attachment in greater detail, its conditions, particularities, and aspects, as well as its effects. I delineate the ethical maxim that leads to it, which I define as ‘withholding assent’. I investigate the various modalities of endurance, and how each author presents different encounters of figures persevering in their being; often, we find struggles with living overlapping with a desire to die or living takes on a form of dying. Indeed, the relationship between the instinct of death and the instinct of life frames and impacts the works of the three authors, and I further explore the manner in which the death drive displays its powers through aggression and trauma. I inquire into the (im)possibilities of utterance as modalities of the instinct of life. To be sure, often ethical encounters are shaped through the process of utterance, and specifically writing, but equally in the powerlessness or complete failure of utterance. I thus trace examples of utterance and writing, and examine the instances in which these miscarry, such that the inability to speak itself becomes as relevant as any event of exhaustive enunciation. The encounters of characters in Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee, in more abstract terms, often diagram encounters in which specific singularities entwine, or fail to entwine, into relations with other singularities, or even with themselves, such that these relationships can serve as a framework for my investigation into the ethics of endurance. I identify examples of such diagrams of encounter in the three chapters; for instance, in Beckett, there is

Molloy's combinatorics exercise in sucking stones as a bodily need; for Kristof, the twins' bodies become 'the notebook' that they are writing and the surface on which their actions are written (or erased); and in Coetzee, the cleft palate of Michael K physicalises his silences. These all serve to foreground the processes of interaction with human or non-human others, external bodies, or internal states in a constantly developing interplay.

One of the most notable forms of encounter which enables the three authors to diagram endurance is writing itself. For Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee, writing provides an apparatus for a divided but enduring self, one which continues as an uttered or written one. For Beckett, 'sayability' may be corporeal and embodied, but it is always in peril of falling into 'ill-sayability', or even 'un-sayability' and in-corporeality. As the bodies of his characters progressively fail, the utterance gradually turns into silence and dissolution, as if withholding assent to enunciation. But even through the impossibility, impotence and failure of physical bodies and the embodied utterance, attempts to utter never cease, and the voice itself perseveres. In such a way, utterance continues as a modality of endurance which can act as a self-creating, but also as a self-erasing, subjectivity. This is perhaps most obvious in the *Unnamable*, where writing is caught in the imperative of incessant utterance and the awareness of its utter impossibility. 'The silence, speak of the silence before going into it, was I there already, I don't know, at every instant I'm there, listen to me speaking of it' (Beckett, 1958, p. 407).

Kristof's twins initially use writing as one of their ascetic exercises that they employ as a mode of self-improvement and desensitization which enables them to withstand violence and abuse; through writing, they train their minds and bodies to be able to bear pain. With this, the exercise notebook they are using becomes the site of their self-writing, and later, of their self-disappearance. Ultimately, their bodies become the notebook, the surface upon which they create, write, and erase themselves. In such a way, writing becomes a process of the production of the self as a mode of endurance. And it also becomes a mode of de-subjectivizing negativity which dislocates and disrupts the subject from itself, leaving it utterly transformed.

In Coetzee, writing as a modality of (de)subjectification is a constant thematic. He investigates the affective significance of self-creation and self-erasure in the process of writing: 'I have no interest in telling stories. It is the process of storytelling that

interests me'⁵. Regardless of the specificities of the characters or the externalities of the given locality, Coetzee is often examining writing itself, its geneses, its dynamics, and pretences to authenticity. As a modality of perseverance of ethical engagements, writing inhabits a space of detached attachment to the self and to others, to the human and the non-human, by means of corporeal surfaces, but not of mutual appropriation. These active, re-active and inter-active subjects operate as figures of endurance and can be charted through different modalities of encounter that I pursue elsewhere in this dissertation. These modes of existence challenge and ultimately dissolve different forms of mastery; the rejection of domination opens a space of expansion without reciprocal appropriation. It is a space of vulnerable, emphatic, indiscernible and departicularised embodied subjectivities.

For Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee, writing as a constitutive life practice serves as an urgent and formative exercise, during which the subjectivity of the text is created simultaneously with the subjectivity of the writer; both are produced within the movement of writing as creation and composition. In this way, the three authors share a similar commitment to the role of writing, but also to language as alien and expatriate; there is a remoteness and a detachment which writing simultaneously tries to overcome, as well as to underscore. Each writer practices a mode of ethics which understands language as one force among a multitude of collaborative acts of becoming, in which language evolves through inter-connected and co-related acts, and in which subjectivity is formed in relation to – not in isolation from – interactions and interchanges with other forces. Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee also share a commitment to bare life, which they dramatize in terms of a series of attenuated and denuded characters and situations. They therefore call attention to the persistent endurance of life itself, and to the striving of a language that attempts to capture it.

As this dissertation takes a philosophical approach to theorizing endurance in literary works, I will now turn to outlining the main philosophical concepts and theories that will serve in the investigation of endurance in Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee. In the following three chapters, I will then refer to these specific conceptualisations, but the majority of the philosophical framework finds its place in this part of the dissertation.

⁵ In his book *J. M. Coetzee. Truth. Meaning. Fiction*, Anthony Uhlmann quotes Coetzee's notes on *Waiting for the Barbarians* which are stored in Container 33.03, Notebook 1 (1977), in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas.

My aim is to bring together different philosophers and several schools of philosophy, most specifically ethics, in order to build a theoretical scaffolding for a new reading of literature that addresses endurance.

Ethics and Anethics. The Body.

As a discipline of philosophy, ethics is concerned with how we live and relate to each other. It considers the relationships that humans conceive and nurture, as well as the ones that they withstand, deflect, refuse, or desist. These relationships can be mutually empowering as they entrust us with care for each other, but they can also serve as disabling battlefields of anguish. Both Stoic and Spinozist ethics consider who we are for one another, what we cause to each other, and cautions us on how to endure what befalls us. Ethics reflects on how relationships can help us expand and thrive or abate and wither. In this process, ethics shapes subjectivities into who we are through the practice of becoming; as Michel Foucault outlines in his work, ethics is a practice of care of the self, ‘the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning’ (Foucault, 1988, p. 9). Yet this cannot be achieved by prescribed rules or definitive regulations; what we are for others is shaped as the relationships are formed, and who we are for ourselves emerges through the movements of this encounter, without it being ontologically dependent on others. And the only way to know who we are to become is by doing the work of becoming, by affecting others whilst opening ourselves to the vulnerability of others, and of ourselves. When writing about ethics, Foucault describes it as ‘making *ethos*, producing *ethos*, changing, transforming *ethos*, the individual’s mode of being, his mode of existence’ (Foucault, 2004, p. 237). In this way, ethics itself changes because of a series of processes that create (and recreate) us as individuals, and our relationships with others. The endurance of these transformative processes, even when relationships are strained or impeded, when circumstances are trying, or when going-on seems impossible, is the focal point of my exploration. Thus, it is through the lens of the experience of inter-relationality that I examine Beckett’s couples; how Kristof’s twins function as a ‘we’; and how Coetzee’s Magistrate describes how during the meeting with the Barbarian girl: ‘I look into the eye. Am I to believe that gazing back at me she sees nothing - my feet perhaps, parts of

the room, a hazy circle of light, but at the centre, where I am, only a blur, a blank' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 36)? Even when the relations are arduous or disempowering, there is always the other, as ethics itself can only materialize in this fluid space of connections, and of becoming.

Thus, while commencing with the Stoic and Spinozist approach to ethics, I further expand my interpretation to incorporate Foucault's reading of ethics. In his *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (1997), Foucault starts with a definition of the subject not as a substance but rather as a form which is fundamentally not identical to itself. This is critical, as it dislodges the subject from a fixed, *a priori* position of a superior thinking substance, and instead positions it in the space of processes, and within it, the activity of transformation. Framed by this, ethics becomes, as Khalip describes in 'Foucault's Ethics' (2018) 'a force that penetrates and rips apart the existence of a self-possessed subject' (p. 156). As such, ethics becomes a disruptive, de-subjectivizing force that ends up transforming the individual's mode of being. For Foucault, care of the self is not so much about prescriptions for an individual's specific behaviour, as much as it is about shaping and changing the self, and about the transformations that this self experiences in its exchanges with others.

Foucault's work guides my exploration of the body as a capacity for ethical exchange, or as *topos* of ethical encounters. Considering ethics as a practical philosophy, a manner of relating to others, humans, and non-humans, allows us to think of the body as a vehicle for these interactions. Often in philosophy, ethics is used interchangeably with morals as a set of prescriptive behaviours, imperatives, or guides for living. This is then used in religious philosophies as instructions for how to conduct ourselves towards others in our communities, how to relate to ourselves, but also as general formulas for acting in the world. From the outset, my dissertation departs from these modalities of ethics, as exemplified by the Kantian categorical imperative, or of any de-ontological ethics as such. While I will indeed focus on acting and relating to others, I will do so from the standpoint of the body as consisting of activity, the body as a force, a potentiality for change, influence, and creation. Rather than the ethical imperatives that would regulate or prescribe a way to live, I will shift the attention onto the processes that happen on the level of the corporeal, and the exchanges and interactions that constitute ethics as a practice. Practicing indicates doing and creating; it is within this process of encounter that ethics is performed, and I identify this

discourse about interactions between various bodies and forces in Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee.

Following Foucault, my first point of departure is the Stoic notion of the body as everything that is capable of activity: a body acts in a way that affects others, while it is simultaneously affected by others in an endless inter-exchange. Every body has a capacity to act, what Aristotle called *dunamis* as a force in its potentiality. This conception radically alters the manner in which we understand subjectivity since it forces us to rethink the question of what constitutes a body, as well as the body's relation to (or dependence on) the mind. And indeed, the Stoics fundamentally dislodge the binary arrangement of Plato's supremacy of ideas which grants the mind authority over matter. They re-evaluate the body as no longer subordinate and dependent on the mind, but instead as an independent, self-sufficient, and self-reliant entity, capable of self-creation, and agency. The Stoics re-examine the relationship between the intellect and the body by removing the duality and bestowing the body productivity and interactivity, as well as reflection, desire, and insight. Thus, a body becomes every thing: object, emotion, quality, and state. This rearrangement is of tremendous significance and profoundly transforms philosophy and ethics. Ideas, concepts, emotions, and sensations that the Platonic tradition thought of as of the mind now obtain a material status (since they hold a power of acting and affecting), and with that, lose their supremacy. If everything is a body, nothing is ontologically superior to any thing else.

The Stoics recognize corporeality as comprising of activity, and its fundamental principle as potential force (*dunamis*). This serves to foreground engagements between various forces, energies, and bodies, such that they connect with one another as acts, cooperating with each other while co-producing, but not co-appropriating. In this type of ethics, no one side is ontologically dominant or superior; instead, we remain on the surface where we are able to connect one to the other like in a Möbius strip⁶. This can be achieved without juxtaposing them one against the other, without placing one above

⁶ In her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), the Möbius strip helps Elizabeth Grosz rethink the relationship between the mind and the body, or the psychological interior and the corporeal exterior of the subject. As a mathematical concept, the Möbius strip allows a fluid connection of the two sides of a paper strip, such that when following the strip, we never reach an edge since there is no precise separation between the sides.

the other, without introducing any type of dualism which would entail mutual exclusivity. Grosz suggests that ‘all the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject’s corporeal surface’ (Grosz, 1994, p. vii). Of course, as Judith Butler reminds us, the body always exists within a discourse, within interactions, but these interactions are not dependent on one side recognizing and validating the other (as in an interplay of self and other that Hegel, and later in a different form, Levinas, shaped). Rather, they proceed without reciprocal corroboration or ontological reliance, as an exchange in which one affects the other and opens itself to be influenced, affected by this other. This openness entails a fundamental vulnerability, empathy, and an inherent receptivity to the singular difference of the other. Where the actuality of one side is not dependent on the recognition of the other, but instead finds its validity in the innate force of potentiality, a new realm of ethics can arise which is not based on mastery, recognition, or even alterity. And once conditional reciprocity is abolished, forms of mastery can be overturned, and structures of dominance dissolved.

Demonstrating the manner in which this leads to a re-examination of the concept of ethics as such, this dissertation will introduce a new and different notion that I will be calling ‘anethics’. I borrow the term from Shane Weller’s article ‘The Anethics of Desire: Beckett, Racine, Sade’ (Weller, 2008) in which he defines anethics as a result of failed ethical imperatives (whether be Kantian, Sadean, or Orestean), such that ‘this failure is neither ethical nor unethical in nature; rather, it is *anethical*. By this I mean that it is the endless reversibility of the ethical and the unethical, without being either non- or pre-ethical’ (Weller, 2008, p. 115). While I adopt his term ‘anethics’, I delineate and expand it within the parameters of endurance as a process of corporeal encounter, which also serves as a capacity for transformation, as well as for a myriad of new compositions. To begin, I do not suggest that anethics is the opposite of ethics, or anti-ethics; rather, I propose it as a new modality of ethics that privileges the corporeal and material forces, as they shape or give rise to the ground of ethics in the first place. Anethics is not driven by moral imperatives which govern our decision-making processes, and there is no prescribed set of rules and expectations which guide our behaviours. Rather, there is a fidelity to life *outside* of these moral imperatives and rules. They are not applied later, or supplied *a priori*, they are not first considered, then rejected. Instead, anethics remains exterior to morals, and the rules stay inconsequential.

More specifically, an anethics of endurance is an allegiance to the perseverance of life in an interminable negotiation with death; as a rejection of the goals of self-amelioration and self-improvement, it is instead a commitment to mere survival in absence of a higher purpose such as virtue. If in Aristotelian virtue ethics there is a striving towards a *telos* as a full potential and a higher goal of an ethical life, then anethics withdraws from any *telos* as such. Yet, this disengagement does not imply a complete self-detachment; as such, anethics is always also a mode of connection with others, to an inter-connected community of humans and nonhumans, of inter-action with one another and creation of new acts, energies, and encounters. In this way, anethics dislocates the ethical exchange away from encounters of mutual appropriation, away from the preformed subjectivities or formats of inter-subjectivity and inscribes it within the play of bodies and encounters. In this dissertation, I aim to demonstrate how anethics initiates corporeal and material forces to act and to be acted upon. Anethics reveals conditions of bare life, even when it comes in the form of dying, and it rethinks endurance in the face of failure, impotence, even death (which serve as key tones in Beckett's and Coetzee's ethical imaginations). I establish how this is achieved by way of 'withholding assent' as an ethical maxim, and by way of 'detached attachment' as an ethical position. Together, these two concepts enable an ethics that presents as a plurality of differences in their singularity. Operating in the space of the material and the corporeal, anethics therefore allows new types of subjectivities to form and arise through and within bodies persevering in their being. In the three main chapters of the dissertation, I focus my explication on what I find to be the most perspicacious scenes in which this is performed in the writings of Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee.

Beckett. Kristof. Coetzee.

'I can do no more. (Pause.) Say no more. (Pause.) But I must say more. (Pause.)' (Beckett, 2006, p. 166). With Winnie's words from Beckett's *Happy Days* serving as a point of departure, I will seek other instances of an ethics of endurance in Beckett's works in chapter one of this dissertation. Starting with failing bodies as modes of endurance, Beckett introduces impotence and inability as the core of his ethics. Beckett's vulnerable bodies as recurring embodiments of an inability to utter serve as

instances of endurance. He describes them in scenes of struggle in relationships with others (most famously his odd couples Vladimir and Estragon, Clov and Hamm, Nagg and Nell, Amy and May, Winnie and Willie), of struggle in their own being, but also of struggle with utterance as such. In these examples, the recurring question is whether to continue, to end, or to resist. On the brink of nothingness where bodies, utterance and meaning have been reduced to bare minimum (or mere being), Beckett finds a tenuous yet tenacious perseverance. In his earlier works, we often find incapacitated or weakened bodies; later, these bodies are seemingly replaced by stillness, silence, music, and images. Yet throughout his writings, he consistently raises the question of the relation of physicality to events of utterance. They are ascribed to voices as acts or processes, and not to voices which are identified with the narrators of the texts; subjectivity is not tied to the speaker or the writer but emerges through the evolving flow of creation. Beckett's voices endure even when there is no body to attach them to anymore; as dis-identified, or as de-individuated, as persistence in utterance itself, which is self-creating and self-persevering. I delineate how these (dis)embodied enunciations are in fact dependent on the Stoic concept of the incorporeals, the subsistent group of 'sayables' which enable the material to come into being by giving it meaning, without themselves coming into being. As Grosz details in a way that resonates with Beckett's voices: 'The incorporeal is the condition under which language becomes more than material, more than breath and trace' (Grosz, 2017, p. 253). In this way, in Beckett, the incorporeals enable utterance and its embodiments, while they continue as non-material, and non-existing. Due to their significance for the theoretical scheme of the entire dissertation, I will dedicate a substantial amount of attention to the incorporeal in the chapter on Beckett.

In chapter two, I turn to Agota Kristof, who depicts often abhorrent and distressing life conditions of displaced persons in post-war Europe, yet insists that, still 'there must be a way of getting through' (Kristof, 1997, p. 177). Charting various materialities of survival, I show how through physicalization of ethics as a way of living, Kristof articulates an anethics as a way of survival. In circumstances of extreme violence of bodies in conflict, but also of radical vulnerabilities of separated bodies, she develops an anethics as the pursuit of self-preservation. As if employing the Stoic ascetic exercises to strengthen their bodies and minds, and with an aim to disengage, the twins of Kristof's acclaimed novel *The Notebook* seek desensitization through acts of

repetitive exercise. ‘We decide to toughen our bodies in order to be able to bear pain’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 16) becomes their maxim of conduct, such that by making themselves hurt physically, mentally and emotionally, desensitization itself becomes physicalized and in-corporated in the pain they experience. To enable this process, they develop an ethical practice of withholding assent, an active and deliberate choice of non-reactivity, non-responsivity, and non-engagement with the outside world, other people, and the pain that is inflicted on them. Without any dependence on the approval or acceptance of others, the twins learn to experience pain as just another exchange with the world, or as an act of dis-engagement with other affective forces. This leads them to an ethical position of detached attachment in which they remain in dis-engaged proximity to others, but in a self-sufficient, non-dependent manner. Withholding assent allows them to step away and remain outside of both positive and negative effects, in a detached attachment of a desensitized and disengaged existence that not only prioritizes bare survival but transforms ethics into anethics as a practice of endurance.

Lastly, in chapter three, I am tracing the anethics of mere survival in Coetzee, which emerges from the desire to live and is again based on the corporeal. I examine several of J. M. Coetzee’s novels to investigate the anethics behind Magda repeating ‘prolong yourself, prolong yourself’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 6) or Anya urging ‘let us just persevere, let us just go on’ (Coetzee, 2008, p. 37). The body as an entity exists only within a discourse, and this opens a space for connections and relationships within communities, as well as a possibility of ethical encounters with the bodies as the *topoi* of these encounters. Coetzee outlines a microphysics of bodies as an interchange of different surfaces, the skin of the bodies acting as points of attachment, but also as arbiters of distance. Such scenes of detached attachment are wrought as an interplay of touching and distance, with the possibility and failure of empathy serving as a connective tissue. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* forms a connection with the girl by simultaneously letting her go; similarly, she concedes to being touched by him, but then refuses to return her gaze in a gesture that repudiates appropriation or domination. We can find the notions of detached attachment and withholding assent further developed in other Coetzee’s works in different events of embodied engagement, including in writing (in *Diary of a Bad Year*), in the desire to endure in attenuated conditions (in *In the Heart of the Country*, *The Life & Times of Michael K*),

and in dying as a form of living (in *Age of Iron*). In the end, what emerges are new types of subjectivities generated and articulated through the processes of these engagements.

With these diagrams as points of entry, I will first further define the concept of endurance, as it is based on an ontological capacity for embodied engagements and revealed most perspicuously in liminal figures. With Beckett's, Kristof's and Coetzee's characters serving as examples of detached attachment of individuals persevering in their being, these figures deliberately withdraw from the mutual reciprocity of recognition, and ultimately undo the concept of mastery. I examine and build upon Salisbury's intention of 'exploring forms of writing that offer a sufficiently resistant shape that otherness might be preserved' (Salisbury, 2012, p. 13). Yet rather than focusing on a dialectic of alterity, a Hegelian or Levinasian ethics of recognition, I investigate how endurance becomes shaped through shared vulnerabilities of touching bodies, and a non-appropriative interaction of energies and forces. Beckett's, Kristof's, and Coetzee's bodies, at thresholds of bare survival, call for an ethics of corporeal investments and physical energies, an ethics that desires life as much as it struggles with it, and an ethics of life that desires death. This type of endurance can sometimes be recognised as a fidelity to mere utterance or writing, as Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee delineate in their writings; as a perseverance in bare life; or as a commitment to bodily encounters. This is again not an ethics of prescribed moral behaviours nor a search for virtue or normative principles. Instead, it is an exploration of what remains when we reject these, and observe what is left behind, an exploration which ultimately leads to what I shall call an *anethics*.

A Genealogy of Endurance and the Anethics.

In order to continue with this literary philosophical delineation of *anethics*, I will examine its relation to the notion of endurance and to the body. This will be facilitated by a brief overview of the conceptual history of endurance in philosophy, with far-reaching implications and of considerable relevance as it bridges many conceptual gaps within different areas of ethics. Endurance also operates as a prerequisite to or precondition for other concepts, such as Confucius' self-cultivation, liberation from suffering in Buddhism, *eudaimonia* in Stoicism, or *ataraxia* in Scepticism, which

abandons all judgement and allows the truth of a specific subject to continue on its own. Plato attributes longevity to the soul and to ideas, while Spinoza conceptualises the *conatus* as an enduring force of life⁷; with this, perseverance becomes an actuality which exists in human and non-human forms. Leibniz attributes endurance to his monads as substances, Schelling writes about the enduring spontaneity of a thinking subject, while Schopenhauer discusses the persistence of the will. Somewhat differently, Freud investigates the desires for life and death as immanently linked to endurance, and Heidegger writes about *Dasein* as a being-toward death which perseveres in dwelling in the world. Responding to Heidegger's thought, Derrida examines what comes to pass and what arrives in the *aporia*, and in the experiences of living on and of dying. Drawing on Spinoza, Deleuze investigates an affirmative ethical life together with the endurance of pain and dying, and about the non-human ethics of affirmation and temporality. And more recently, Badiou speaks of fidelity to an event as a form of endurance, while Agamben writes of the bare life of *homo sacer*.

Clearly, philosophy is saturated with different definitions of endurance, but while it is often related to other concepts, it holds a theoretical independence of its own. This will be my focus here, as I endeavour to establish it as a fundamental cornerstone of anethics as a modality of ethics. To put differently, endurance acts as its constitutional component, such that it is impossible to theorise anethics as separate from endurance. The enduring figures that emerge in the works of Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee allow us to examine endurance as it relates to anethics, as well as to other key notions in more detail.

But despite (or perhaps because of) the abundance of interpretations of endurance within philosophical thought, in order to unfold this exposition on Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee, it is necessary to limit the philosophical scope and to remain within the frame which is consistent with the writings of the three authors. Thus, I will engage primarily with the Stoics and Spinoza, often in relation to Descartes, then briefly with Schelling and Schopenhauer, followed by Foucault, Deleuze, and Freud, and in comparison, to Hegel and Levinas. I will also consider the works of Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, Hasana Sharp, Rosi Braidotti, Anthony Uhlmann, Ulrika Maude, Laura Salisbury, Shane Weller, Alain Badiou, Steven Connor, and Cathy Caruth, and how

⁷ The *conatus* serves as a central concept to the anethics of endurance and I will write in much more detail about it below.

they engage with and expand on the concept of endurance, as well as on the question of the body within ethics.

Self-preservation, the Lekta and Other Incorporeals, the Conatus and the Anethics.

There are three central notions foundational to what I call the anethics of endurance: the Stoic notion of self-preservation, the Stoic notion of the *lekta* (as the incorporeal ‘sayables’), and the Spinozist term *conatus*. To begin with, for the Stoics, self-preservation is the central characteristic of all living things. Cicero thus writes:

a living creature feels an attachment for itself and to feel affection for its own constitution and for those things which tend to preserve that constitution; while on the other hand it conceives an antipathy to destruction and to those things which appear to threaten destruction (Cicero, 1931, III.16).

The instinct to maintain its own life is written within a living being, and it acts as a guiding force of its existence. Similarly, Diogenes Laertius reports in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (2015) that self-preservation serves as the first impulse of all animals. The self-preservation Cicero and Diogenes Laertius are describing is a primal instinct shared by all animals, including humans. As a building block for endurance, the notion of self-preservation lies dormant and unopposed, a steady force for endurance which is present at the inception, but which also serves as the ultimate goal. As such, it lays the groundwork for Spinoza’s conceptualisation of the *conatus*, the definition of which is preceded by: ‘Nothing can be destroyed except by an external cause’ (Spinoza, 2000, III P4). For Spinoza, there is nothing in the essence of a thing that could lead to destruction; the fundamental, internal core of everything is self-preserving and all potential destruction always originates in externality. The power to self-preserve involves an indefinite time, as it has no specific beginning and no foreseen end; every thing continually strives to endure in its own being. This account of Spinoza’s *conatus* is, at first blush, notably similar to one made by Descartes, whom Spinoza simultaneously admires and attempts to depart from. In his *Principles of Philosophy* (1983), in the First Law of Motion, Descartes states: ‘That each thing, as far as is in its power, always remains in the same state; and that consequently, when it is once moved, it always continues to move’ (Part II, Art. 37). This ‘timeless nature’ of the self-

preserving instinct as an intrinsic and indispensable feature variously presents itself in the philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza, the Stoics, and later even in Freud. For the Stoics, the instinct of self-preservation can lay inactive and dormant, while Freud's life and death instincts function resolutely in opposition to one another. For his part, Spinoza's *conatus* as an instinct is consistently and unfailingly active in a self-preserving manner. But despite these differences, incessant self-preservation presents itself as a key concept for understanding and galvanizing the ethics of endurance.

Yet, ethics always already suggests some type of connection to others. The positive outcome of the interdependence between individuals and their communities can depend on the equilibrium of the self-preservation of the person with the well-being of the people⁸. Ethical subjectivities are never fully formed but are processes of the transformation of selves that are always becoming. Further, subjectivities are conceived through interactions, productively, by affecting and by being affected, through change and mutual transformation of selves and (with) others. Thus, if ethics refers to how we relate to others, how we act, it also takes into consideration how we re-act or respond and how these interactions change us, and how we partake in the creation and recreation of the self. This structure applies to other relations which can also be interpreted as correlated with and not separated from the other but rather as co-producing, co-generating. We can infer a similar format from the Stoic relationship between the physical and the non-physical, where the corporeal and the incorporeal present as parallel modes of reality, separate but not separated, interrelated, although never joined. This relationship is of central significance for the anethics of endurance and for the way that this dissertation addresses other types of relationships that are traditionally considered in binary or dualistic terms. The challenges of finding this axis, and of the inter-connected relationships as such, serve as one of focal points in the works of all three writers. Beckett explores them in the many couples' relationships; Kristof in the

⁸ To explain this in greater detail, we can further differentiate between the Stoic term *horme* (as vital energy) and *oikeiôsis* (as what is one's own), although they are both sometimes translated as the *conatus*. As Jon Miller clarifies in his book *Spinoza and the Stoics*, *horme* refers to a single psychological impulse, which happens at a specific time and leads to action which is related to external objects. On the other hand, *oikeiôsis* brings together the notions of self-preservation in one's own being with the spirit of community. *Oikeiôsis* refers to what belongs to itself, what is one's own, but it also refers to the cosmic *polis* of others. And as such, the meaning of *oikeiôsis* is closer to Spinoza's *conatus* than *horme*, as much as it always refers to the community of others.

doubled subjectivity of the twins as then navigate life with (but mostly at a distance from) others; and Coetzee through the multitude of difficult connections that humans form with other people, animals, and non-human entities.

Since the Stoic concept of the incorporeal plays such a vital role for all embodied engagements, it deserves a more detailed delineation. Grosz explains that the ‘incorporeal are the immaterial conditions for the existence and functioning of matter, including those configurations of matter that constitute the varieties of life’ (Grosz, 2017, p. 5). This has a significant impact on how we understand the material world around us, as well as ourselves as parts of the world. Since the Stoics recognise the universe as corporeal, that is, as comprised of bodies⁹, and claim that every thing is a body, then all that remains outside of this material world are the incorporeal. As such, the incorporeals *subsist*, that is, they operate, they maintain a critical function, but they do not actually exist (if they did, they would be bodies). They serve as conditions for the corporeal, they can have meaning (but do not need to be said), and they do not have full being. The Stoics identify four main types of incorporeals: void, space, time and the *lekton* (what is ‘sayable’). All of them enable bodies to come into being as their conditions, yet they remain outside of being, only subsisting. For instance, we think of objects as being in space and time, but the space and time themselves are not constitutive parts of these objects; rather, they dwell outside of the material objects as their infinite, immaterial conditions. On the other hand, the corporeals as substances exist, they are particulars that make up the material universe around us, and as bodies they can act and be acted upon. ‘Stoics assign ontological primacy to the corporeal – they hold that only bodies exist – and in keeping with this, they confine substance to the physical realm alone.’ (Miller, 2005, p. 120). In other words, the world that we can experience is material, but as such, it is dependent and conditioned by the world that we do not see, the immaterial, non-existing realm of the incorporeal. Bodies can endure only because they are enabled to do so by the non-bodily, subsisting incorporeal. And in the three main chapters, I will elaborate further on the relationship between the corporeal and the incorporeal which is presented in the works of the three authors, since each one of them offers a unique account of it, elucidating different facets of this

⁹ Again, a body is everything that incorporates activity, which expands the definition of a body to all things, animals, qualities, emotions, sensations, forces, energies, and states. *Everything* is corporeal, apart from the incorporeals.

correlation. The most discernible example of this relationship is Beckett's consistent commitment to the investigation of utterance, its conditions and (im)possibility, and how it relates to voices, bodies, and writing.

Spinoza's Bodies and the Conatus.

The Stoic interpretation of the corporeal and its relationship to the incorporeal, as well as their concept of self-preservation serve as central cornerstones to the anethics of endurance. They are reformulated into some of Spinoza's key philosophical concepts which also act as vital elements to this dissertation, and to the anethics of endurance as such, namely the mind-body relationship, and the *conatus*. Here, I will summarize the essential notions of Spinoza's philosophy, with the focus on the concepts that I call upon in my account of anethics of endurance.

If Descartes sharply separates thought and extension, or mind and body, and gives undisputable primacy to the mind, Spinoza rejects this schism and explains mind and body as two among the infinite expressions of the one substance (God or nature). All are dependent on this one substance, but in a way where the substance exists only as this system of mutual causality between things. All finite things are thus bound to one another, as well as to the infinite force of nature, and this gives ground to a new type of ethics, one of interconnectedness which abstains from the primacy of one over another, and instead opens a type of ethics in which domination is abolished. Enabling differences to exist in their singularity, as well as in interrelation, in separation as well as in togetherness, can have momentous significance as it grants equal ontological status to all singularities. Body and mind remain independent from one another, such that a human being is a mind *and* a body but in a way in which 'a body is not limited by a thought nor a thought by a body' (Spinoza, 2000, I d2). They exist as two different expressions of the same substance, and this implies that although once primary, as in Platonism and Cartesianism, the mind now becomes ontologically equal to the body. Epistemologically, they remain separate, which means that the universe can be explained as a physical matter, or as ideas, without interaction, dependence, or dominance of one over the other.

As the essence of every entity is endurance in its own being, this striving for perseverance (which Spinoza names the *conatus*) becomes a focus of any investigation of endurance: ‘The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing’ (Spinoza, 2000, III, p6, III, p7). And while this inexhaustible will to persevere in life can be affected by the interactions with other modes of being, it is essentially inherent, indestructible, and self-determined. To live ethically, according to Spinoza, is to affirm life by opening to otherness, and by seeking the best relations with others, relations that are empowering and that enable any thing to persevere in its being. This search for empowerment, for anyone, becomes a daunting task, but especially for Beckett’s, Kristof’s and Coetzee’s characters who are struggling to persevere despite adverse circumstances, seemingly exhausted powers, and failed encounters. As Hasana Sharp puts it: ‘Precisely because individuation is never complete, relations are power relations’ (Sharp, 2011, p. 40). Yes, we may seek external empowerment, but the core of our being, the *conatus*, remains independent and indomitable. Therefore, it is not in the abundance of joyful affects and best relations that the notion of endurance becomes ethically potent, but rather in the absence of affirmative conditions, or, to use Beckett’s words, it is in the ‘I can’t go on’ that the question of endurance becomes urgent.

Furthermore, this interpretation of the relationship of minds and bodies persevering in their inter-connected independence applies to all bodies, as well as to nature as a whole. For Spinoza, most things are composite bodies (with the human body as just one example), comprised of many different body parts and organs, cells, and bacteria, as well as millions of other microorganisms and elements. These singularities are unable to survive in isolation from one another, but they also do not exist as servants to the whole, their independence as such is unnegotiable. Thus, a community of singularities is formed based on relationships of collective responsibility as well as mutual vulnerability. According to Sharp:

if humans are distinguishable from other beings by virtue of our relative complexity rather than an atomic spiritual principle, we are also distinguishable by being constituted by a *greater* need of others. As feminist theorists have long argued, it is to the intensity of our dependency and involvement with one another that we owe our agency. We act only because we are perpetually ‘joining forces’ with myriad beings in complex ways. (Sharp, 2011, p. 39).

The *conatus* as a force of perseverance might be the essence and the foundation of every being, but social communities are built on mutual encounters and reciprocal vulnerability. With the closeness of the relationship between individuals and community in the forefront, it is precisely this trans-individuality, the holding on to our own independent *conatus* while acknowledging a reliance on others, that awards us with a greater power of individuation, such that ‘to be active or to be an adequate cause is *also* to establish a relationship with others, albeit not one of dependency (not even ‘mutual’ dependency) but of *convenientia* or synergy’ (Balibar, 2020, p. 24). Our individuation, as much as it is conditioned by the *conatus*, is ultimately a work-in-progress, an endless interaction with other powers of perseverance, an interactive process of transformation. Revealed by mutual vulnerability and illuminated by empathy, an infinite number of individuals involved in an endless series of relationships with others affect one another whilst allowing to be affected, in an openness to reciprocity without mutual ontological recognition.

Endurance and the Drive in Philosophy.

In this section, I will take a closer look at the concept of self-preservation as it presents itself in drives (or, as they are interchangeably referred to, as instincts), as well as the relation to anethics of endurance. The power to continue even in dire circumstances where there seem to be no reason to persist, and no goal to pursue, affirms the capacity of the *conatus* to survive; in anethics, endurance pertains to persevering without an external, higher *telos*.

Although it does not remain a central focus of philosophers who respond to Spinoza’s philosophies, the will to self-preserve as a form of endurance can be found in many of their works. The origins of its relation to the instinct or the drive can be traced back to Aristotle and it is framed by the legacy of his *dunamis* as a force in its potentiality, and *energeia* as the activity which actualises the potentiality. This invisible, but powerful force of causation is further developed by other philosophers: Leibniz writes in his *Principle of Continuity* about the interminable nature of things: ‘Nothing takes place suddenly, and it is one of my great and best confirmed maxims that *nature*

never makes leaps' (Leibniz, 1923, A VI vi 56/RB 56)¹⁰. Later, in what is considered as one of the first uses of the term, Fichte¹¹ introduces an infinite, striving 'drive' (*der Trieb*) as a foundation for our temporal life, itself constrained by the world of appearances. Schelling, responding to Hegel and referring to both Spinoza as well as to Fichte, reaffirms the existence of the drive, but gives it a transcendental character, which lifts it out of the phenomenal world. He also introduces the concept of fluidity as a 'tendency to infinite development', which provides finite things with the condition of their creation. Following Schelling, the enduring force of the drive also becomes an important concept for Schopenhauer, and later, famously, for psychoanalysis. Schopenhauer writes about the energies flowing through the universe, with a non-rational impulse, which is the foundation of our instinctual drives. He names this the will (*der Wille*), a mindless and aimless striving towards existence and life which is devoid of intellect. Each thing in the endless multiplicity of objects wants to exist, and it possesses an illogical, ceaseless striving to live, to be. Schopenhauer's enduring fortitude of striving, of the multiplicity of representations, as well as of the will, remain the focus of this dissertation, and they find their echoes in Nietzsche's will to power, in psychoanalysis, and later in Deleuze's vitalism.

But perhaps the most far-reaching conceptualisation of the drive for this dissertation is theorized in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961)¹². There, he famously introduces two separate instincts, or drives, Eros and Thanatos, or the instinct of life and the instinct of death. Commencing from Schopenhauer's statement that death is the result of life and thus its purpose, Freud introduces Eros as life-affirming, 'the preserver of all things', which stands opposed to death as a destructive, aggressive

¹⁰ While Leibniz introduces several different forces, the pertinent ones for this dissertation are *vis activa primitiva* (primitive active force), which reinterprets Aristotle's *energeia* as a manifold of acting and affective forces which enable a body to persist; and *vis pasiva primitiva* as an enduring force which resists outside intrusion or breach. These different energies and forces are all, for Aristotle and for Leibniz, ultimately versions of self-preservation and perseverance.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek gives a comprehensive account of the principles of Schelling's and Fichte's philosophies in his book *The Invisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (2006).

¹² This is a rather difficult book to read, as Freud brings us along on a journey of exploration of different ideas and definitions, which he weighs against one another, discards some and accepts others, with the reader accompanying him in this investigation. The concepts that I adopt for this chapter are regarded as final outcomes, although Freud's awareness of his theory being a constant work-in-progress remains.

counterpart. These two are caught in a perennial struggle, and it is their continuously unfolding encounter that forms our civilisation. Freud then rather paradoxically calls the struggle between these two drives life itself, which is consequently not reducible to the instinct of life. ‘Both classes of instincts, Eros as well as the death instinct, would, on this view, have been in operation and working against each other from the first origin of life’ (Freud, 1961, p. 259). Thus, life becomes the struggle of the life instinct and the death instinct, with Freud constantly moving between the two meanings of life, but either way, living is not possible without the death drive (which, as such, is endlessly unceasing and fundamentally interminable). Judith Butler explains: ‘If life itself *is* this struggle, then there is no life without the death drive. We can even extrapolate logically that life without the struggle provided by the death drive would itself be death’ (Butler, 2015, p. 73). A pertinent example of this is Elizabeth Curren in Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* (1990), who is living as a dying person, enduring the process of her life ending, facing death *while* living with the awareness of her imminent passing. And although the battle between life and death drives is a central force of everyone’s life, for Curren, it is the awareness of the impending end which becomes the focus of her current life. Coetzee encapsulates this perseverance in life as it confronts death in other works, too, from *Life & Times of Michael K* (2004), to *In The Heart of the Country* (2014), *Slow Man* (2006), and perhaps most succinctly with the quote: ‘I want to live. As every man wants to live. To live and live and live. No matter what’ (Coetzee, 2010, p. 137). This is life at its unrelenting, rawest force, also epitomized in the Unnamable’s insistence on going on, not despite, but by means of the utter impossibility to continue. Even when the body and the utterance are reduced to near disappearance, the unnameable source of the voice still authorises the utterance to continue.

Trans-Individuality and Community.

If I have so far focused on self-preservation as it conveys itself in the *conatus* and the drives or instincts, in relation to self and others, I would like to now direct attention onto the relationships of human and non-human individuals who are all enduring in their being. I will examine the conditions and the structure of these relationships in relation to the two foundational elements to the anethics of endurance, ‘withholding assent’ and ‘detached attachment’.

As a practical branch of philosophy, ethics pertains to a way of living with ourselves and others persevering in their being, humans, and non-humans. Judith Butler, in 'The Desire to Live. Spinoza's 'Ethics' Under Pressure' (2015), offers a notion of positive, affirmative perseverance as a condition of possibility of ethical relationality:

This being desires not only to persevere in *its own* being, but to live in a world that reflects and furthers the possibility of that perseverance; indeed, perseverance in one's own being requires that reflection from the world, such that persevering and modulating reference to the world are bound up together. ... 'to persevere in one's own being' is thus to live in a world that not only reflects but furthers the value of others' lives as well as one's own (Butler, 2015, p. 65).

In the anethics of endurance, there is no dependence of one on another (as in Platonist or Cartesian primacy of the mind), or mutual appropriation (as in Levinasian philosophy of recognition); rather, there is a way of allowing the two (or more) sides to co-exist in their specific singularity, without one validating or substantiating the other(s). Yet there is a connection between the human and non-human beings that share this strength of endurance as a common feature, while remaining sovereign in their particularity. Of course, Beckett's, Kristof's, and Coetzee's characters are also navigating their own perseverance within the world around them, both human and non-human. 'He thought of himself not as something heavy that left tracks behind him, but if anything as a speck upon a surface of an earth too deeply asleep to notice the scratch of ant-feet, the rasp of butterfly teeth, the tumbling of dust' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 97). This stunning rendition of the blurred lines between humans, other animals, and non-humans, between subjectivity of a person and that of the environment, serves as a noteworthy example of Coetzee's interpretation of the relationship among different beings as various *conatuses*. All these modalities exist in a constant exchange of affecting and being affected, and all are interconnected in a non-dependent manner. Deleuze names this ability of affect *puissance* and describes it as a power which represents the being's ability to affect, as well as to be affected. Yet unlike Spinoza, Deleuze interprets affect without the substance as a unifying force, but rather understands it as a power of acting, and acting together. His is a world of infinite encounters between various modes (or differences, or *conatuses*), existing in an endless process of affect that creates an infinite number of assemblages, acting together while also acknowledging their heterogeneous particularities. 'The task of life is to make all these repetitions coexist in a space in which difference is distributed' (Deleuze, 1995, xviii). This also applies to individual bodies constructed of nonhuman

elements which are all constantly interacting with one another, and with the external elements of human and nonhuman origin. In this way, clear limits of outside and inside disappear, as well as those of human and nonhuman, of mind and matter, of strength and powerlessness, of voices and silences. We are left with encounters, forces, acts, bodies, affects and energies which exist as series of collaborative acts, departicularised, yet persevering in a desire for life. This is a space of an ethics of encounters and of a fidelity to ontological perseverance, wherein no one being is striving alone, and wherein every striving is intertwined with others, affecting them while being affected by them. And it is the fortitude of this striving that fuels the evolution and expansion of life.

As I indicated before, this dissertation introduces the notions of ‘withholding assent’ and ‘detached attachment’ as constitutive postulates to an ethics of endurance, but also as alternatives to the appropriating relationships of mastery and supremacy. Together, and as such, they offer a different version of ethics, one that signifies correspondence, inter-relations, even inter-connection, in equality without capitulation to identity, similarity, comparison or prescription. Withholding assent as an ethical practice (or a modality of encounter) of deliberate non-responsivity, non-reactivity and non-engagement becomes an ethical maxim embodied in the works of Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee. Their characters often exist in power-driven relationships but choose to withdraw from them in a way in which they do not overtake or subvert the dynamics of power, but rather step out of this dialectic as such. They do not surmount, prevail or overthrow; instead, they make an ethical decision to withhold their assent to all types or sides of dependent recognition; withholding assent to being a master or a slave implies a withdrawal from the power dynamic of the relationship as such. It is a conscious and purposeful choice to disengage: ‘She does not answer my words, but I plunge on, embracing her tightly, speaking thick and muffled into her ear: ‘Come, tell me why you are here’. ‘Because there is nowhere else to go’ (Coetzee, 2010, p. 46). A master who has lost his position, the Magistrate is trying to establish a relationship with the Barbarian girl, but she disregards his attempts and, by withholding assent, remains withdrawn, even while she is being touched by him. By dwelling in a space of non-responsivity, she withholds becoming an other to him. I adopt the term ‘withholding assent’ from Anthony Uhlmann, who defines it in his article ‘Withholding Assent: Beckett in the Light of Stoic Ethics’ (2008) as an active refusal which ‘amounts to an active reinterpretation of the real, which, in some sense, succeeds in changing that

reality' (Uhlmann, 2008, p. 59). In this way, withholding assent as a process denies the acknowledgment and validation, and it can also apply to emotions or passions which interfere with reason. When applied broadly, withholding assent therefore allows a withdrawal from fixed identities and relationships of dominance, that is, an abrogation of oppression as such. As an active, engaged process, withholding assent holds a potentiality for change, and the power of new creation.

The other postulate of anethics of endurance is 'detached attachment' which describes a relationship of different singularities that are connected in their difference, albeit they remain distinct and independent from one another. Detached attachment comes in where withholding assent left off and it continues to build on in a way that allows singularities to exist as self-determined, self-sustained and self-supporting, allowing the others to endure in their own being, without dependence on the other. In the Hegelian dialectic, one singularity depends on an other for mutual reciprocal recognition. That is, self-consciousness can only be defined as such because it is recognised by another self-consciousness. For Levinas, there is a fundamental necessity for mutual reciprocity when it comes to the acknowledgement and validation of ourselves as subjects. In both philosophies, there is an ontological reliance on the other, such that one cannot exist until it is recognised by this other. This consequently introduces a hierarchy into the relationship, since the dependent can only validate its own existence via the other, even though this validation goes both ways and the need for recognition is mutual. The anethics of endurance substantiates ethical encounters without this dependency. It does so rather through transformational forces which engage with one another yet retain their autonomy and independence from the other. Thus, once subordination is removed, the bodies as humans, non-humans, forces, energies, or voices and utterances can meet as equals, as persisting in their own quest for survival, and in their power to persevere. They all define, regulate, and sustain themselves, even though they engage with others, and this allows them sovereignty in their being, and self-determination in their interactions. As such, they are free to connect or even intertwine with others in a self-directed and self-sufficient way, as an ethical collaborative act. And once hierarchies, mastery and subjugation are all dismantled, what becomes affirmed is a new type of ethics, one which can replace subservience with a connective tissue of empathy.

In the three chapters that follow, I expand on the philosophical framework which I have delineated in this introduction and demonstrate how the notions that I develop or acquire from philosophy find their literary embodiments in the works of Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee. I seek to do so in a comprehensive way within the purview of the concept of anethics. Commencing with the indomitable strength of the instinct of self-preservation, or Spinoza's *conatus*, their characters persevere with an inexhaustible tenacity, through and despite adversity. Their relationships with others are sometimes arduous and often impossible, but their ethical commitment to withholding assent as a deliberate non-responsivity removes them from all forms of appropriation. This further serves to foreground the ethical position of detached attachment as a conduct of life which allows them to remain authentic in their autonomy and difference, without seeking recognition or requiring affirmation from others. As Rudolph Barnet puts it, 'The dynamic takes precedence over the static, restrain over actualization, lack (*sterèsis*) over accomplishment, and the presence of an absence over full presence' (Barnet, 2020, p. 4, 5). The anethics of endurance is predicated on this fortitude to withhold assent while persevering in detached attachment; it is a fidelity to the processes of creation and recreation, transformation, and change, and also, to erasure and dissolution. But mostly, it is a fidelity to endurance in being in life (even in negotiation with death), to the corporeal (even when conditioned by the incorporeal) and to all its processes that generate new subjectivities through engagements with other bodies, energies, forces, and acts.

Chapter One

Endurance, Incorporeality and the (Im)possibility of Utterance in Samuel Beckett

The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue. No, I must not try to think, simply utter. Method or no method I shall have to banish them in the end, the beings, things, shapes, sounds and lights with which my haste to speak has encumbered this place. In the frenzy of utterance the concern with truth. Hence the interest of a possible deliverance by means of encounter (Beckett, 1958, p. 299-300).

Introduction. Encounters.

To read Beckett is to read in and through bodies. Across his writing, he offers detailed descriptions of bodily processes and sensations, physical actions, and moments when forces act upon bodies, and uncertain encounters of bodies in motion and in contact. As is well known, Beckett's bodies are often bodies that breakdown or are rendered vulnerable, that are given to blocked sensory perceptions and impeded functions, and that attempt to speak to each other and are met with the impossibilities of utterance. He draws diagrams of immobility: in *Happy Days*, we find '*Winnie embedded up to neck, hat on head, eyes closed. Her head. Which can no longer turn, no bow, nor raise, faces front motionless throughout the act*' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 161). In the first novel of the trilogy, he writes: 'For Teddy was old, blind, deaf, crippled with rheumatism and perpetually incontinent, night and day, indoors and out of doors' (Beckett, 1958, p. 33). Or, as Molloy himself exclaims: 'To be literally incapable of motion at last, that must be something! My mind swoons when I think of it. And mute into the bargain! And perhaps as deaf as a post! And who knows as blind as a bat! And as likely as not your memory a blank! And just enough brain to allow you to exult!' (Beckett, 1958, p. 140). Beckett not only brings attention to Molloy's bodily processes, but also epitomises his embodiment through that of his mother: 'In any case I have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more' (Beckett, 1958, p. 8). Other times, the abilities of the characters' bodies are limited, as with Malone and the Unnamable who are immobile, or Clov who is unable to sit, and

Hamm who is blind and unable to stand. We meet characters who are limping, crawling, pacing, and falling (*Murphy*, *Malone Dies*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Footfalls*). Ulrika Maude therefore celebrates Beckett as a writer of the material body:

[if] it is the material body that forms the ultimate foundation of identity, by constituting the self that is both singular and, in its perpetual complexity and mutability, always plural and indecipherable, then it is Beckett more than any other writer who deals with this predicament in his work (Maude, 2009, p. 2).

The predicaments that befall the material bodies of Beckett's characters are also, perhaps like Molloy, further punctuated by psychological or neurological ailments, as they manifest symptoms of schizophrenia, autism, coprolalia, mutism, aphonia, and possible psychosis. But throughout the various predicaments, what carries his characters forward is the effort to persevere in their existence, which is determined by numerous encounters. Subjectivity, as such, is sustained in the corporeal. As I state in the Introduction, I take as an initial premise the Stoic definition of the body as everything that is capable of action and influence, and with Spinoza's further clarification that a body is anything that affects and can be affected, that is, anything that reacts to other bodies. This means that all bodies can act and be acted upon, and in this way, all being is corporeal¹³, including the voice and utterance as such (both of which serve as Beckett's topics of focus), and which entails that speech is also corporeal. Words don't act as expressions of thoughts, but rather as articulations of the forces that thoughts embody, and they serve as responses to these forces and affects. In this way, speech can be explained as a result of these affective interactions.

To summarize, who and what we are can only be established and transformed by the bodily encounters with other human and non-human multiplicities. The endeavour to persevere in our own existence (or, the *conatus*) endures as a lasting force, such that these exchanges with others affect it, but do not ontologically diminish or alter it. Therefore, if the power of endurance is fixed, subjectivity is not; instead, it is shaped through and by these encounters, via the affective exchanges. And if the body is a cause which itself cannot generate physical characteristics, but rather relations or events, then the body is not an object or a thing, but rather a process of encounters, a practice, and as such serves as an agent for the emerging individuality, as well as subjectivity.

¹³ The list also includes objects, forces, ideas, thoughts, emotions, qualities, and states.

In this chapter, I endeavour to read Beckett within the terms that allow the bodies to meet and to fail to meet; to mutually individuate and to be marked by shared failures to individuate. Beckett's bodies find themselves in strange positions, and shift their positions, if they can move at all. Thus, the relationships between bodies and the spaces of encounter that envelope them are at one with processes of the constituting and de-constituting of subjectivities. Yet, at the same time, these corporeal encounters become the site for Beckett of processes of dis-identification or de-individuation. The body becomes both a site of subjectivity as well as of de-subjectified phantasmatic materialities; as bodies become capacities for embodied engagement, they are also the sites of undoing or outflow: 'I, of whom I know nothing, I know my eyes are open, because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly' (Beckett, 1958, p. 304). Beckett's failed encounters, or even self-encounters ('I, of whom I know nothing') act as modalities of encounters, and not as encounters that failed to happen.

To clarify this further, I will present Beckett's anethics in terms of several interrelated modalities of encounter, namely, (1) lessening/worsening (2) detached attachment, (3) withholding assent, (4) (ill-said) utterance, (5) writing as a form of endurance, and (6) dying as a mode of living. These modalities differ in their modes of articulating relationships of perseverance, in deciphering various capacities for embodied engagement, and in their specific ontological vulnerabilities. But they are unified in their allegiance to the material, to the dismantling of mastery as well as the dialectic of self and other and are given to processes of departicularisation and becoming imperceptible. Beckett's bodies, as Maude holds, are singular and plural; they are departicularised and indiscernible, but also enduring in its vulnerability. Instead of bodies as physical objects, Beckett explores bodies as processes of interactions with other bodies, human and non-human. As such, Beckett provides a *typology* of modes of ethical encounters, as well as an *ethology* of modes of existence rendered in terms of bodily forces, energies, and surfaces.¹⁴ He directs his attention to the corporeal interactions, to processes, to acts, to 'doing' rather than 'being'. And it is precisely these encounters of bodies which are key to understanding how Beckett choreographs what could be called an anethics of endurance.

¹⁴ I have outlined a more expansive theoretical exposition and a broad outline of the fundamental philosophical cornerstones of my reading of Beckett in the Introduction to this dissertation.

1. *Failure, Impotence, Inability, Lessening and Worsening.*

As Beckett's failing bodies serve as the *topoi* of his ethics of endurance, he takes inability, ineptitude, and impotence as the nuclei of his ethics, not as failures to achieve it. He embraces powerlessness and employs it as a foundation for endurance, not as its mishap. In this way, he overturns the traditional dynamic of the significance of success and failure, or, as Connor describes it: 'To 'work with' impotence is to enter into a reordering of the relationships of power and powerlessness, because it is an attempt to take possession of one's poverty, to neuter impotence by affirming it, to resist subjugation by embracing it' (Connor, 2007, p. 187). The understructure of ethics in Beckett's oeuvre is built by the power of impotence as the *conatus*, the foundational driving force of relations. Beckett's characters strive to preserve not despite their powerlessness, but in terms of it, such that their ethical encounters are marked by collaborative acts of disempowered endurance. While substantial critical attention has been paid to how failure underscores Beckett's ethics, here the primary point of my investigation will be to explore more closely how his ethics of impotent endurance is related to what could be called the endurance of utterance. For Beckett, utterance both cannot begin and cannot end, even when it fails to produce any meaning; the question of endurance is intimately interlaced with the inability of utterance, and the failure or the possibility of an ending to utterance. Indeed, ethical physical encounters can be located within this striving to utter, which is entangled with the resistance to achieve it. 'The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue. No, I must not try to think, simply utter'. Beckett's proposition above to not think but just utter reveals the pursuit of the said to be not only always ill-said and un-said, but also embodied, such that any possible 'deliverance' can exist only as an encounter of different corporeal entities that come together as collaborative acts. If his earlier writings relate the powerlessness to weakened bodies, his later texts¹⁵ yield to utterances shorn of bodies. In *Not I* (first published in 1972), all that is left is a mouth as a voice embodied in its most basic structure. In *Footfalls* (1976), this voice becomes

¹⁵ In this chapter, I will direct more attention on the trilogy of plays *Not I*, *Footfalls*, and *Rockaby*, and on the novellas *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill said*, *Worstward Ho* and *How It Is*, as well as selected later plays, the trilogy, and *Texts for Nothing*.

completely disembodied, elusive, with the conditions of its (possible) existence rendered questionable. In *Rockaby* (1980), the voice and the body are altogether separated, with each of them representing a self in its own form; the voice itself is detached from the character's body, it is mechanical and externally controlled, while the body becomes progressively weaker, and the rocking slowly stops. *Ohio Impromptu* (1980) then disjoins the voice of the Listener from that of the Reader, exposing a chasm between the once joined ghostly couple. 'With never a word exchanged they grew to be as one' (Beckett, 2006 a, 447). But in the end, as the Reader's soothing voice ceases with 'nothing is left to tell' (448), the two remain, silently looking at each other.

The advancement of 'lessening' (or 'worsening')¹⁶ as most emblematic modes of both corporeal encounter and utterance is further investigated in the three late novellas *Company* (first published in 1980), *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1982), and *Worstward Ho* (1983)), where this process encompasses not only the voice and the body, but also other domains of the text. Anthony Uhlmann states that 'all the elements which need to be worsened – the images, the words, time which moves and oozes on, and the void which surrounds all – become fixed in place, in being reduced to points which are near enough to absolutes. They suddenly, inexplicably, without revealing the necessity for touching it, achieve a limit' (Uhlmann, 2011, p. 92). But the limit, crucially, is not nothingness; rather, Uhlmann shows that being and non-being (or nothingness) exist at this limit in a form of stasis. Here, I will further unfold how Beckett's ethics of encounters relies on the acts of being-in-collaboration with nothingness, the 'what is' converging with 'what is not' in a non-appropriative manner that is initially conceived in *Watt*. In this way, being and nothingness encounter each other outside of a relationship of power, or their encounter fails. But because they withhold mutual appropriation, they both avoid the relationship of mastery (of both suppressor and saviour) and remain in a relationship of (self)remoteness and (self)incompleteness, which enables their encounters to endure. Worsening or lessening, as traced in *Worstward Ho*, thus names the complex process by which the said is always verging on the ill- or un-said, and the bodies are always at the brink of their own incorporeality.

¹⁶ Anthony Uhlmann explores this comprehensively in his article 'Worstward Ho, Parmenides, Badiou and the Limit' in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 20.1 (2011), pp. 78-95.

Similarly, through his notion of ‘exhaustion’, Deleuze traces this lessening by way of language, with its first variation still identifying names, only to exhaust all words and give way to voices. ‘When you exhaust the possible with words, you trim and chop atoms, and when you exhaust the words themselves, you dry up the flow’ (Deleuze, 1997 a, p. 156). With the process of worsening, we eventually arrive at the language which does not refer to words, objects, or even voices, but rather to spaces and images as processes, which insert themselves into the silences, the gaps, and the hiatuses. This is the terrain of encounters in Beckett’s late writings. For Deleuze, Beckett’s starting with a body and ending with utter exhaustion describes not only a catatonia, physical immobility or incapacity that seizes his characters, but rather a creative process of exhausting all possibilities. This exhaustion leads to a ‘creative involution’, if not a creation of an entirely new subject.¹⁷ For this reason, Beckett (and Deleuze) do not consider physical immobilities or arrested sensations as hindrances or limitations. Instead, Beckett regards them as particular and contingent embodiments of forces that give rise to a series of corporeally specific encounters in which the human mind and body are brought to their limit of functioning. Throughout his writing, Beckett is in critical dialogue with the ethical philosophical tradition, which centres on the relationship of physicality, the thinking subject, and language. Yet he eschews the Aristotelian heritage of a primary cause, the Cartesian thinking substance (*res cogitans*), or even the Freudian subject as subordinated to the unconscious. Indeed, as I will seek to show, Beckett’s philosophical interventions in the relationship between physicality and subjectivity are underscored by his ethics (or anethics) of endurance. So, to begin, I will lay the groundwork for these forms of encounter by rethinking Beckett’s often assumed fidelity to Descartes as the foundation of his ethics, in order to argue how we might better understand the ethical potential of his work through the Stoic notions of *lekta* (the ‘sayables’), sense and self-preservation, and Spinoza’s concept of the *conatus*. However, at the same time, I will posit that the events of corporeal encounters that shape his ethics of endurance are accompanied by events of utterance that carry with them an irreducibly incorporeal sense, as Beckett performs this succinctly in *Not I*.

2. *Detached Attachment. The Corporeal and the Incorporeal.*

¹⁷ In more detail in Gilles Deleuze’s *Essays Critical and Clinical*.

‘The less I think the more certain I am’ (Beckett, 1958, p. 12).

Here, I am following the Stoic notion of *lekta* as an incorporeal but complex entity that inheres in events of utterance, as Deleuze describes in *Logic of Sense* (1995, p. 19). Deleuze adopts the notion of *lekta*¹⁸ from the Stoics, who initially define them as the incorporeal beings which are *subsisting* rather than *existing*. This is notably different from the corporeal objects or existing things as particulars. *Lekta* and other incorporeals, such as void, space and time, can signify, but cannot cause as corporeal things do. This in turn becomes relevant for Beckett, as much of his writing is positioned in this space of *lekta* as the incorporeals that signify and have meaning but cannot be physically tangible in a way that language as writing is. Beckett increasingly attributes significance to the physically intangible incorporeals, so that in his later plays both are interwoven, the physicality of the language as utterance, which can be written or heard on stage, with the multitude of incorporeals which constitute much of his dramatic works. Yet the interplay of the corporeal and the incorporeal uttering is also always intertwined with the impossibility of utterance. *Lekta* as ‘signified things’ do not need to be uttered to have meaning, the utterance can and often does fail, or the source of the speaking is unidentified. Yet Beckett’s characters seemingly endure—or find enduring subsistence—in and through these unuttered, impossible, ill-said, or failed utterances; in this space of nothing but utterance, they might not be producing any explicit meaning, but they are still making sense.

Thus, an anethics of endurance for Beckett is not just a question of ‘failing better’ or ‘going on’; it is rather a complex negotiation of events of bodily encounters, of processes of subjectification, and the production of sense. While events of utterance for Beckett are corporeal and embodied, sayability and corporeality in his writing nonetheless always risk falling over into ‘un-sayability’, ‘ill-say-ability’, or into bodily disintegration, if not into silence and annihilation. Beckett’s ethics is, so to speak, ill seen, unsaid, and ill said, or it works at the level of the corporeal event of announcing a withholding of assent, or falling silent and immobile. In this way, withholding assent can also serve as an event of utterance, where what is ultimately withheld is sense itself. ‘It’s in the head. It doesn’t work any more, it says, I don’t work any more. You go

¹⁸ I write in more detail on *lekta*, as well as other foundational Stoic terms in the Introduction of this dissertation.

dumb as well and the sounds fade' (Beckett, 1958, p. 8). At this axis of corporeality/say-ability and incorporeality/ill-say-ability, we can locate the ethical potential of his infamously liminal figures. It is an ethics of encounters where surfaces, dis-composed faces, ill-said utterances, and murmurs converge in acts of the corporeal and the incorporeal, in a relationship of detached attachment, where they remain connected in their singularity.

In Beckett's late writing the voice does not need a physical body to establish language as utterance, or utterance as corporeal, and this opens the questions of the role of the mind, the connection between the mind and the body, as well as their conditions. The relationship between the corporeal or material language and the incorporeal (in the philosophy of the Stoics, these are void, space, time and the *lekta*) is one of dependence; the incorporeal conditions enable the material language to come into being by giving it meaning, without themselves becoming material. The void becomes occupied by an object which comes into presence, but the void itself does not materialize; similarly, the *lekta* as the 'sayables' enable the articulation of utterance, as well as its embodiment (either as a written trace on paper, a breath, or a sign language), without themselves becoming material. The question that also follows, then, is how the relationship between the corporeal and the incorporeal relates to the relationship between the mind and the body in Beckett's writing. I will present this within the framework of detached attachment as an inter-relation of two otherwise distinct notions, as they persist in their singularity, bound together in their difference and independence. And I will indicate various examples of this relationship, from the mind and the body, to the corporeal and the incorporeal, being and non-being, and utterance and ill-utterance. Detached attachment allows them to exist in their authentic sovereignty, without reliance on others, and without appropriation.

Any attempt to answer this first leads back to Descartes, not only because he so precisely defines the parameters of the mind-body relationship, but also because Beckett's early texts (especially the poem *Whoroscope* and the novel *Murphy*) are closely related to his philosophy. Despite engaging with Descartes' ideas in his early writings, Beckett's foregrounding of physical movement and the encounters of bodies ultimately serves to denounce the traditional duality of the mind and the body, and instead highlights the capacities of the material to provide a foundation of an ethics. Yet it is important to note that Beckett does not consider the body as a fundamentally

detached entity from the mind, as in Cartesian¹⁹ philosophy, but rather as an equivalent, although different presence. Concerned with the resonances of this separation, the first strong wave of Beckett criticism focused on this Cartesian split yet read his texts as favouring mind over body²⁰. And indeed, there is no doubt that *Murphy* engages with Descartes:

Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse together apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experience came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither followed from the other. He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one (Beckett, 2006 b, p. 68).

Here, the separation is determinate and definitive, such that the awareness of thinking does not emanate or directly relate to the body but originates solely from the conscious attention to the process of thinking. The mind with its faculty of judgement utilises the deductive method to obtain knowledge; the body is determinedly secondary. Despite his return to Descartes in *The Unnamable*, which can also be read as an exercise in Cartesianism with all the knowledge stripped away,²¹ Beckett radically departs from this metaphysical framework. If Descartes separates thought and extension, or mind and body, with a distinct preference for the former, Beckett ultimately rejects not only the supposed primacy of the mind, but the complete separation as such. Descartes regards material objects and bodies as being accompanied by an autonomous and self-governed world of ideas, while Beckett sees bodies as both irreducible to ideas, as well as inseparable from them. Thought and extension are not ontologically severed from one another, instead they exist as two different forms of expression. Beckett writes in *Malone Dies*: ‘My body does not yet make up its mind’ (Beckett, 1958, p. 198), describing an irresolution of a body, which is not fundamentally discordant from the mind, but rather bound in their difference, in a relationship of detached attachment.

¹⁹ In his notes on philosophy, Beckett refers to Geulincx’s version of Cartesianism almost more often than to the direct source himself.

²⁰ Perhaps best known are Martin Esslin’s *Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1962) and *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), and Hugh Kenner’s *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (1961) and *A Reader’s Guide to Samuel Beckett* (1973).

²¹ Notably, David Tucker in his comprehensive *Samuel Beckett and Arnold Geulincx: Tracing ‘a literary fantasia’*, as well as Anthony Uhlmann, both find a closer connection to Geulincx rather than Descartes.

Within this relationship, neither the mind nor the body are subordinate to one another, inadequate or deficient when compared to the other.

This transformative move away from the primacy of the mind and (in)to the body subsequently shifts the structure of subjectivity away from the exclusivity of thinking and toward the expansiveness of the body and all its processes. Hence, in analysing the manners in which the human mind and body function at their limits, Beckett is concerned with corporeally specific encounters, with what cannot be said, as well as with what fails. He delineates human limitations, whether via physiology, psychology, psychiatry, or neurology²². ‘The next pain in the balls was anthropology and the other disciplines, such as psychiatry, that are connected with it, disconnected, then connected again, according to the latest discoveries. What I liked in anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not’ (Beckett, 1958, p. 39). Beckett offers a reading of the relationship between the body and the mind in which the body becomes both a site of subjectivity as well as a phantasmatic materiality, and characters perform as capacities for embodied engagements. He details sensory perceptions, basic bodily functions, and forms of movement or stasis. ‘... sick headaches... eye trouble... irrational fear of vipers... ear trouble...’ – nothing more for us there – ‘fibroid tumors... pathological horror of songbirds... throat trouble... need of affection... ‘we’re coming to it – ‘inner void...’ (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 242). The often-fragmented body is not an object, or a thing; rather, it is a series of processes of encounters. And the difficulties that the body experiences offer the more intensified and clarified version of its identity, as these experiences are established by the bodily sensations.

Moving past Cartesian dualism, Beckett’s unique perception of the corporeal is further revealed through its relation to the Stoics and Spinoza. In his interpretation, the body is not subordinate, inadequate, or deficient when compared to the mind, but is an independent cause with a being (as it is interpreted in Stoicism), or a different perspective on the one and the same substance (God or Nature in Spinoza). ‘Over and over again in his work Beckett emphasizes the incarnate nature of subjectivity, while

²² Ulrika Maude, Laura Salisbury, and Elizabeth Barry convened a project titled ‘Beckett and Brain Science’, which brought together scholars researching this segment of Beckett’s writing, and produced an impressive collection of works, including their article ‘Introduction – Beckett, Medicine and the Brain’, published in 2016 in the *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 37, pp. 127-135.

simultaneously demonstrating how vision, hearing, touch and technologically enhanced forms of perception expand the limits of the body, facilitating the subject's transgression beyond itself' (Maude, 2009, p. 136, 137). For Beckett, subjectivity is not found in the exclusivity of the mind and its thinking, but rather in the expansiveness of the body and all its processes. Beckett dramatizes the physicality of thinking in the pacing of Clov in *Endgame*:

(Clov resumes his pacing.)

Hamm: What are you doing?

Clov: Having an idea.

(He paces.)

Ah!

(He halts.)

Hamm: What a brain (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 47)!

Rather than the immobile *cogito* which doubts away its own non-existence, Beckett offers us a brain ('What a brain!') that finds its idea in transit; having an idea as a 'doing' activates the *cogito*-qua-subject out from its intellectual stasis. That is, thinking becomes a silent and mobile activity and not a disembodied passivity. And furthermore, the body, as Grosz reminds us, 'must be seen as a series of processes of becoming, rather than as a fixed state of being' (Beckett, 1994, p. 12). Again, Beckett is more interested in the process itself, in what is becoming, instead of what already is. This movement away from Descartes and the primacy of the intellect puts Beckett in closer proximity with Spinoza's proposition that the mind is our idea of our body. Other times the self-enclosure of the *cogito* is forgotten or its boundaries fall away. In *Molloy*, Beckett's narrator admits: 'Yes there were times when I forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to be. Then I was no longer that sealed jar to which I owed my being so well preserved, but a wall gave way and I filled with roots and tame stems' (Beckett, 1958, p. 49). To forget to be is a thought, and as such, a bodily act, as Beckett here physicalizes both the utterance and the being. Even if the corporeal is conditioned by the incorporeal (or the void and spaciousness inside the sealed jar), the force of the body consists in the activity of one affecting and influencing the other. And since the activity of this force is in every thing, whether it is of physical or intellectual provenance, it implies that all being is corporeal.

With a resolute attention on the corporeal encounters and the activity of the power of the *conatus*, Beckett discovers in Stoicism another figure of corporeality,

which further clarifies the relationship between the body and the mind, as well as between the corporeal and the incorporeal. This is a modality of encounter that serves both on the level of physicality as well as utterance, and because of its comprehensive and expansive nature, it ultimately allows Beckett to pursue a new notion of subjectivity. The relationship of detached attachment allows the mind and the body, the corporeal and the incorporeal, as well as utterance and the inability (or lack) of utterance to exist in their autonomous, self-determined and self-sufficient way, independent from one another, yet connected in their difference.

3. *Withholding Assent. Master and Slave.*

‘involving for one and all the same obligation precisely that of feeling without fear while pursuing without hope’ (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 143).

As Uhlmann shows, Beckett’s notes on *A History of Philosophy*²³ indicate that as early as the 1930s, Beckett was already very familiar with the Stoic concept of action. And according to Uhlmann, he was particularly interested in the connection between action and the disposition of the one who acts. Everything with the ability to act, to affect and be affected, and to cause something, is a body, and this includes what we usually understand as states or as qualities of a body. In this causal way, ideas and thoughts are also corporeal (since they create and generate), or as the Stoic Chrysippus describes, from wisdom comes being wise, from the soul, living. Beckett’s Stoicism, by extension, shows that by ‘doing a thought’ comes (in Clov’s terms), ‘having an idea.’ But whatever the cause might be, whether it is thoughts, passions or bodies, there remains the option of ‘withholding assent’, of not accepting or giving in, despite recognising the potentiality of its activity. ‘To withhold assent here means to refuse to acknowledge their power as ‘reality’’ (Uhlmann, 2008, p. 60). When exploring the concept of ‘withholding assent’, Beckett chooses the example of passions and the words ‘denying assent’ to refer to them: ‘*Virtue* (control of passion by reason) is the sole good, *Vice*

²³ By Wilhelm Windelband, as noted in Anthony Uhlmann’s article ‘Withholding Assent’, in *Beckett and Ethics* (2008).

(control of reason by passion) is the sole evil'²⁴. But whichever relationship we invoke, withholding assent recognises the inescapable connection between its elements, without authorising the reign of one over the other; when universalized, this has the potential to abolish subjection or mastery.

The Stoic concept of withholding assent thus offers Beckett a unique exit from the Cartesian ontological reliance of the body on the mind. But withholding assent can also be considered as one of the modalities of encounters that is located outside of the relationships of domination, subjection, or the conditional mutual recognition. Withholding assent initiates a relationship of detached attachment, where subjects become joined in their difference, but also in their mutual independence. This can refer to the relation between the body and the mind, the corporeal and the incorporeal, or another specific relationship. It does not, on the other hand, annul physicalization, as long as we understand everything that is capable of acting, or being acted upon, to be a body. The modalities that Beckett utilises to enunciate, such as words on paper, sounds on stage, echoes, or simply breath, are embodied articulations of utterance. As withholding assent fosters a relationship of detached attachment, Beckett can replace the 'I think, therefore I am' with 'the less I think the more certain I am' (Beckett, 1958, p. 12) and remove the Cartesian privileging of the mind from embodied thinking. Instead, he understands thinking as another type of corporeality, and as such, visceral rather than intellectual. In this way, the thinking that is considered to be of the mind (as in Plato, Descartes, or any other form of idealism) becomes the opposite of Beckett's, where the mind itself is corporeal.

Beckett adopts an onto-ethical praxis of withholding assent on many occasions, but it comes into focus perhaps most prominently in the withdrawal from the master-slave dynamic. This retraction opens a terrain for an ethics of nonbiased and equable exchanges, yet it can only be achieved if all forms of mastery are unconditionally renounced. 'Hamm (shocked): I haven't made you suffer too much? Clov: Yes' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 7)! An ethics of withholding assent, then, runs counter to the tradition of ethics of recognition, in which the master and slave dialectic is the driving force. Levinas's ethics of alterity and intersubjectivity maintains this logical form, even if it is premised on mutual vulnerability. And Levinas's definition of one's subjectivity

²⁴ Again, I am following Uhlmann's 'Withholding Assent' (2008), where he quotes Beckett's notes held at Trinity College Dublin (114).

as formed and reliant on the subjection to the other follows Hegel's ethics of mutual recognition. For Hegel²⁵, we only exist as a self-consciousness *because* we are recognised as such by another self-consciousness, and this can only be achieved through mutual recognition. Yet this process, for Hegel, involves a struggle, which precedes the final recognition, and which includes a negotiation between a master and a slave, and ultimately leads to a battle for life (or death). Scenes of mastery and the undoing of mastery are common in Beckett's work, most famously in *Endgame* as well as in *Waiting for Godot* which offers a seeming parody of the master and slave dynamic:

Whip! (*Lucky advances, stoops, Pozzo snatches the whip from his mouth, Lucky goes back to his place.*) Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (*he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes*) even when the likeness is an imperfect one. (*He takes off his glasses.*) Stool! (*Lucky puts down bag and basket, advances, opens stool, puts it down, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket.*) Closer (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 17)!

If, in Hegel, the fundamental condition of a master and slave relationship is the compliance of the slave to remain in this position, then as soon as he withholds his assent, the master loses the power to subordinate, and the relationship disintegrates. So, for Beckett, 'withholding assent is one way in which such process of subjection or enslavement might be resisted' (Uhlmann, 2008, p. 66). With one simple gesture of withdrawal, the prerequisites for this type of subjectification are annulled, the master is stripped of primacy, and the slave is liberated from bondage. But at the same time, the master and slave are liberated of liberation too – or conversely the master is freed from the bondage of his relation with the slave. Indeed, withholding assent undoes all the processes of subjection as such, as well as the ontological ground on which the processes sit: the ground of mutual recognition. Rejecting an ethics of recognition, either Levinasian or Hegelian, leads to an avenue outside of the ethics of appropriation, and instead approaches what Elizabeth Grosz calls (after Deleuze) an ethics of imperceptibility, and what I would like to call here an ethics of endurance. In a manner similar to Melville's *Bartleby*, who held onto his: 'I would prefer not to', the prerequisite of an ethics is the undoing of mastery, as well as of the intersubjective

²⁵ It should be noted that Hegel built his understanding of mutual recognition largely on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's as well as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's premises of the necessity of another consciousness for the formation of our own. Because a detailed and just account of both is unfortunately outside of the scope of this dissertation, this note will have to suffice.

reciprocity of alterity. Liminal figures, which endure to the point of imperceptibility, refuse to be an 'other' to another, and with this gesture, they annul mastery itself. Anethics, understood this way, is not so much a withdrawal from ethics, as it is a withdrawal from the power dynamic of mastery driven by the desire for recognition. Beckett's characters would rather endure the ill-said or ill-seen than make the scene of a 'you' dependent on the dominating 'I' to become legible.

Yet some of Beckett's characters struggle with this much longer than perhaps appropriate, as if they cannot grasp the possibility of imagining a life free of servitude. As if the familiarity of bondage affords a sense of safety that the uncharted spaces of being free from freedom might not: the unknown, it appears, is more frightening after all. In *Endgame*, despite recurrent threats to leave, Clov endures in his servitude to Hamm. Even after Clov gets 'dressed for the road', he does not leave. 'Panama hat, tweed coat, raincoat over his arm, umbrella, bag. He halts by the door and stands there, impassive, and motionless, his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end' (Beckett, 2006, p. 82). The last words of the play are spoken by Hamm: 'You ... remain' (84). Clov stays. This moment of dwelling is further explored in *Waiting for Godot*, where Beckett is reiterating and reprising variations of the master and slave relationship, both between Vladimir and Estragon, as well as between Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo: 'Stand back! (*Vladimir and Estragon move away from Lucky. Pozzo jerks the rope. Lucky looks at Pozzo.*) Think, pig! (*Pause. Lucky begins to dance.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Forward! (*Lucky advances.*) Stop! (*Lucky stops.*) Think! Silence' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 28). Inasmuch as they are caught in a quest for recognition (or in Hegel's terms, considering that their consciousness is dependent on another), the power shifts, and self-destruction and self-assertion remain endless and unresolvable processes.

On the other hand, anethics relinquishes struggles, on a subjective, as well as intersubjective level, as it takes its point of departure from different conditions. It takes an alternative approach to ethics as it endorses investments in the corporeal and material forces and appoints, in lieu of the primacy of thought, the body; instead of mutual recognition, desubjectification, departicularisation, imperceptibility; in place of mastery, vulnerability. 'At first I was a prisoner of other people. So I left them. Then I was a prisoner of myself. That was worse. So I left myself' (Beckett, 1996, p. 147). Relinquished is the subject as constituted by another, refused is the responsibility for the other, what is left is a mere being as a capacity for survival in embodied engagements

with others. Furthermore, moral imperatives are replaced by a complex set of corporeal encounters in which there is a congregation of various energies and forces, an intertwining and affecting and being affected by each other. These encounters of failed mutual recognition continue without appropriation, detached, and attached, across obscured surfaces. In Beckett's ethical landscape, the only way the perseverance of each *conatus* as a body can become intertwined with others through their collaborative acts, is by evading the traps of mutual recognition and its capture into the master-slave relationship. Beckett's interest in the *conatus* as a force of life leads him to characters whose endurance is attenuated to the point of sheer survival, whose positive relations and characteristics are stripped away, and yet who continue to live on the verge of vanishing. They continue to live on together, to vanish together. Beckett's characters are often unable to exist without one another (most notably Winnie and Willie in *Happy Days*, Clov and Hamm in *Endgame*, Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*), in forever shifting power dynamics, and even as they linger together on the edges of language and silence. Their bodies are joined by various forces and energies, which also eschew the dialectic of self and other and mutual recognition, and instead interoperate through shared incapacities and opacities. By first withholding assent to all forms of dominance and subjection, they form a bond of detached attachments, in open vulnerabilities. They open a non-appropriative space as a space of an ethics of endurance.

4. *Utterance, Silence, The Un-Said, The Ill-Said.*

'If it's I who speak, and it may be assumed it is, as it may be suspected it is not, how it happens, if it's I who speak, that I speak without ceasing, that I long to cease, that I can't cease' (Beckett, 1958, p. 389). There is a voice, but its provenance is unknown, its nature equivocal, and its abilities dubious. 'The voice in Beckett implies a body, a bodily point of emission and a bodily point of reception, but its location is uncertain'²⁶. It moves from the position of the narrator in Beckett's earlier novels (*Murphy*, *Watt*) to the role of the inquirer of that position (*Malone Dies*, *The*

²⁶ Mladen Dolar, 'Nothing has Changed', pp 48-64. Available at manchesterhive.com/9781526146458, p. 56.

Unnamable), and ultimately becomes non-placeable, non-attributable, un-namable. It tries to interpret, describe, or relate, then admits to its own inability to achieve any of this. It is often confused and uncertain, it negates itself and what it does. The voice is not the 'I' of the writer, it is not the narrator as the subject, nor is it a person; clearly, Beckett is one of the heirs of Barthes' 'death of the author'²⁷. Rather, the 'I' of the voice in Beckett's writing belong to no one but the process of writing itself²⁸. It talks and listens, it utters and goes silent, it writes and struggles to write, it multiplies itself, loses and finds itself again, and it incorporates the readers as co-creators of the texts. 'But there is not silence. No, there is utterance, somewhere someone is uttering' (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 328). Its ability to endure even at the limits of survival is unquestionable, and its perseverance resists its own demise:

It issues from me, fills me, it clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know, its round that I must revolve, of that I must speak, with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me, or if there are others, to whom it may belong, they have never come near me, I won't delay just now to make this clear (Beckett, 1958, p. 307).

Again, Beckett utilizes the modality of detached attachment as a template of a relationship between the non-placeable voices, and he uses withholding assent as a tool to achieve it. By not attaching the utterance to any one specific voice – the voice of the subject, of others, the text, the reader, or any other external entity – Beckett is able to expand the scope of enunciation.

Yet he is also struggling with the possibility of ending utterance. Beckett's last novel of the trilogy serves as an attempt to finally extinguish all utterance, but the endeavor fails, and this failure itself is the triumph of the enduring voice that keeps producing enunciations even when it arrives to the edge of nothingness. To stylistically perform perseverance on the verge of survival, and in another exercise in detachment, Beckett strips the language of the unnecessary, he reduces the narrative to the bare minimum, he shortens the content, and diminishes sense. He carries his protagonists to

²⁷ Michel Foucault expands on this in his essay 'What is an Author?' (1969), and Derrida develops his own interpretation in 'The Deaths of Roland Barthes' (2007).

²⁸ This, of course, is the space of Foucault's intervention with the question of 'who is speaking'.

the brink of physical exhaustion, which is reflected in the progression of their physical deterioration and mirrored in the constant digression of the voice. We can observe how this decline advances through the trilogy and its characters, from Molloy to Malone and Moran, to its ultimate reduction in the Unnameable who questions its own existence as such. Parallel to the degeneration of the body, we witness incessant attempts in naming the unnameable, and in the end, we are left with a voice which is unable to fully express itself or the silence that is its own origin and source, yet it is also utterly incapable of stopping.

There I am in any case, equipped with eyes, which I open and shut, two, perhaps blue, knowing it avails to nothing, for I have a head now too, where all manner of things are known, can it be of me I am speaking, is it possible, of course not, that's another thing I know, I'll speak of me when I speak no more. In any case it's not a question of speaking of me, but of speaking, of speaking no more (Beckett, 1958, p. 392).

The act of speaking utters itself into physicalized existence, and writing becomes an act of self-creating, as well as self-preservation. Originating from its power of endurance, utterance is embodied as an active force. As Shane Weller writes, 'All that stands between that nothing which is the speaker and that nothing which is the spoken is utterance itself. As such, utterance would be neither constative nor performative; it would neither produce nor reflect. It would simply be' (Weller, 2005, p. 108). This enduring existence of utterance is a theme which I will focus on not only in Beckett, but also in Coetzee and Kristof, as it connects the three authors in their mode of writing. They are equally joined in their approach to writing as a form of self-erasure and disappearance, and in this, becoming-other through the materiality of language.

The voice might be all that is left at the end of the trilogy, with all the characters and physical scaffolding stripped away, yet it remains stubbornly corporeal. Here, we are again reminded of Chrisyppus' explanation that a 'voice is a body, since everything capable of action and influence is a body' (Lossky, 1929, p. 482). Again, this implies that utterance itself is a body, and this definition is crucial for both the Stoics as well as for Beckett, whose writing portrays a materialistic understanding of the voice that finds an embodied subject always attempting to create some physical evidence of itself. It does not limit himself to only the physical body; when the body fails (as in *Malone*, *Molloy Dies*, or *Happy Days*), or where the body is abolished or absent altogether (as in

The Unnamable, *Texts for Nothing*, and *Breath*), he uses bodily senses to generate a material trace that is left behind.

Whose voice, no one's, there is no one, there's a voice without a mouth, and somewhere a kind of hearing, something compelled to hear, and somewhere a hand, it calls that a hand, it wants to make a hand, or if not a hand something somewhere that can leave a trace, of what is made, of what is said, you can't do with less, no, that's romancing, more romancing, there is nothing but a voice murmuring a trace (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 337).

Even when Beckett removes everything but the human breath, the voice, and its inability to utter words are represented by a corporeal trace; the voice thus becomes a metonymy for the body. Reflected in *Breath*, where the play of light with the breath going in and out performs the extimacy of the corporeal,²⁹ is the Stoic term *pneuma* (which literally translates as breath). As the sustaining cause of all existing bodies, animate and inanimate, humans, plants, animals, and objects, *pneuma* travels inwards and outwards as it moves through a body. As a force, *pneuma* keeps bodies together and unifies them as objects, and it serves as an active embodiment of an otherwise elusive breath; as a process, *pneuma* serves as a unifying connective movement.

I will return to the voice later in the chapter, but I will now consider other modalities of corporeal uttering that Beckett utilises, before returning to the incorporeal. Beckett's embodied subjects are marked by their struggles to utter, or to constrain their utterances in ways that often combine with immobile and/or permeable corporeal states: 'For Teddy was old, blind, deaf, crippled with rheumatism and perpetually incontinent, night and day, indoors and out of doors' (Beckett, 1958, p. 33). These disjunctive modes of embodiment serve as reminders that bodies are not objects or things, autonomous and independent from external elements, but rather processes of encounters interacting with other bodies, forces, and energies. Corporeality as such articulates itself through activity, by affecting and being affected in an inter-active manner, and as an ongoing reconciliation between the self and the other. In other words, Beckett approaches the body as a verb rather than as a noun, as an active endeavour in an external environment, rather than as a physical object whose boundaries are self-

²⁹ 'Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 371).

sustaining. And in this way, the body serves as a site of a subjectivity which is always interacting with others.

Another common mode of embodiment in Beckett's writing are substitute bodies, which are often tied to failing and aging bodies. As substitutes, Beckett often produces visible objects to replace and represent the missing or frail body parts. One of visually most prominent examples is the mound in *Happy Days*, providing a replacement part for Winnie's immobile legs, and, increasingly, her upper body. 'Yes the feeling more and more that if I were not held – (*gesture*) – in this way, I would simply float up into the blue. (*Pause.*)' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 152). This missing, invisible body part is juxtaposed by the visible part of Winnie which Beckett describes as 'well-preserved, blond for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 138). She becomes progressively more immobile as the mound grows, challenging the boundaries between the interior and the exterior, present and past, visible and invisible. This increasing immobility is further underlined by Willie's parallel increasing silence, such that the more Winnie talks, the quieter he grows, and the more her body gets buried in the mound, the more his unrestricted mobility accentuates the gap between them. Winnie's increasing physical incapacity is further reflected in a heightened urgency for utterance, as if her incessant talking is keeping death at bay. 'I can do no more. (*Pause.*) Say no more. (*Pause.*) But I must say more. (*Pause.*) Problem here. (*Pause.*) No, something must move, in the world, I can't any more (*Pause.*)' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 166). The utterance is what must endure, and does endure, even with a motionless body and when all else fails, her continuous speaking is withholding death while confirming the life of the voice, which continues producing embodied traces of itself. 'There always remains something. (*Pause.*) Of everything. (*Pause.*) Some remains. (*Pause.*) If the mind were to go (*Pause.*)' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 161). The force of the *conatus* consists of the ability to endure despite adversity; or, put differently, its capacity for unconditional perseverance is the sole imperative of anethics. Even when the bodies fail and the mind goes, what persists finds a physicalized form of its power of acting. And the one thing that prevails despite numerous attempts to abolish it is the enduring utterance.

Yet there is another dimension to the corporeal, which is central to Beckett's writing, and which we can track as his writing evolves, starting with impaired physical bodies, continuing with the voice(s), and culminating in his late works in the space of

imperceptibility. The origins of this evolution can also be traced back to the Stoic concept of the incorporeal as the immaterial condition of matter. As mentioned before, the incorporeals are not something, but also not nothing. The Stoics maintain that all causes are bodies, but the effects of these material causes cannot themselves be bodies; rather, the incorporeals are what enables the corporeal to obtain being and meaning. They do this without imposing *a priori* categories (as Kant would suggest), universals or qualities, but by creating a space in which bodies can exist. In this way, the *lekta* (as the ‘sayables’) enable the utterance itself and allow us to express what can be said of the corporeal world, without themselves becoming embodied. This passage from *Texts for Nothing* further recounts the utterance’s dependence on the *lekta*:

I am not in his head, nowhere in his old body, and yet I am there, for him I am there, with him, hence all the confusion. That should have been enough for him, to have found me absent, but it’s not, he wants me there, with a form and a world, like him, in spite of him, me who am everything, like him who is nothing. And when he feels me void of existence it’s of his he would have me void, and vice versa, mad, mad, he is mad (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 306).

In a space where there is no coherent story left, and no narrator to tell it, Beckett focuses on the writing itself, the utterance as a process which includes and interweaves the writing and listening, the readers and the text, the words and the silences, the going on and the standing still. The *lekta* serve as the conditions of utterance, but also of Beckett’s questioning the voice, and they furthermore enable him to produce utterance as material, whether as written traces, physical gestures, or even just breath. Additionally, Beckett articulates the states, processes and events that are incorporeal as they cannot be reduced to the physicality of a body. ‘Whose voice, no one’s, there is no one, there’s a voice without a mouth, and somewhere a kind of hearing, something compelled to hear’ (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 337). Therefore, even when he is incapable of identifying the source of the utterance, or to stop it altogether, he is left with a voice that keeps generating, despite not being embodied in a visible physical body of a narrator or in any other apparent corporeal presence. He can only relate to it in a mode of detached attachment, without bilateral appropriation or reciprocal conditioning. The utterance maintains its independence from the voice(s), from the narrator, from the stage and even from the text itself. It does not come from the mind (utterance is not a product of thinking since all speech is corporeal), or the body; and even when Beckett externalises it (as in *Krapp’s Last Tape*, where the voice is alienated and embodied in a tape

recorder), or dissevers its connection to the speaker (the voice without a mouth in *Texts for Nothing*), there is still the mechanism of utterance as an ethical practice which sustains the enunciation, and which is conditioned by the incorporeal. And while utterance may be a body that exists (as such, it is material), its conditions are the *lekta* that sub-sist and enable the articulation of what can be uttered. When Beckett's bodies and voices are brought to the point of the void, when life and death merge to become indistinguishable (and approach a point of vanishing), while the voice becomes that of an other, an intruder, or a prosthesis, what is left is this minimal almost-nothing, the *lekta*, which keeps the utterance going and, as such, alive.

5. *Writing as Self-creation and Self-erasure. Subjectivity.*

'I did not want to write, but I had to resign myself to it in the end. It is in order to know where I have to go, where he has to go' (Beckett, 1958, p. 207).

The question of the embodied, but depersonalized voice striving for survival is accompanied by the question of the subject in Beckett's writing, and by a query about origin, proprietorship, as well as tenure of the voice; what is its source, who or what speaks, where are its limits? We learn quickly that it does not belong to the narrator, but as we follow its flow of words in an endless digression of discourse and constant shifting of position, we are left with an unplaceable, yet enduring utterance. And framed by the proposition that all humans and non-humans exist as capacities for embodied engagement, and that the voice endures (even when disembodied), we can outline in more detail a new definition of subjectivity, and of ethics. If utterance serves as a placeholder for subjectivity³⁰ in Beckett, it cannot be located in an established, determinate position, but is always persevering in motion. In contrast to Descartes's thinking subject, Kant's transcendental subject as independent from all empirical causes and effects, as well as Hegel's or Levinas' reliance on the recognition of the other,

³⁰ Largely corresponding to Foucault's, my definition of subjectivity recognizes the activity and the process of becoming, the exchanges with others that affect, shape, and transform the individual, as they produce a new mode of being. The processes of withholding assent and detached attachment allow this movement of continuous becoming to remain free from appropriation or fixation, instead, they embrace reinvention and transformation.

subjectivity for Beckett does not rely on a dialectic of reciprocity, or on pre-determined, prescribed conditions. Rather, commencing from self-remoteness of beings as capacities for embodied engagements, Beckett thinks about forces and energies in their determination to continue. Without interdependent appropriation, this type of subjectivity depends on imperceptibility and self-incompleteness. It is not established *a priori*, but only through experiences of encounters. It is sustained by the tenacity of striving.

One of the modes in which these experiences create the self is writing as a self-creation, and as such, as a mode of self-preserving, ethical endurance. This is the only imperative Beckett subscribes to, and it is evident throughout his work that the unavoidable, and often unbearable necessity to write serves as the drive which conducts all his work.

... no idea what she is saying! ... and can't stop ... no stopping it ... she who but a moment before ... but a moment! .. could not make a sound ... no sound of any kind ... now can't stop ... imagine! .. can't stop the stream ... and the whole brain begging ... something begging in the brain ... begging the mouth to stop ... pause a moment ... if only for a moment ... and no response ... as if it hadn't heard ... or couldn't ... couldn't pause a second... (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 380).

Thus, as Beckett's characters are facing death and utterance remains on the brink of cessation, it is the withholding of death itself, the refusal to end, that enables them to continue, and that keeps the utterance alive. Freud's instinct for life therefore translates into an instinct for utterance, or the force of determination of the necessary and persistent enunciation, which is always on the verge of dying, yet it always survives. As a mode of endurance, it finds its ultimate embodiment in writing, and it perseveres in the face of difficulties, impairments, immobility, bodilessness, silence, end desire for death. In this way, the imperative to continue uttering and writing serves as Beckett's formulation of the *conatus*, the sustaining power of self-organisation and self-determination to continue. And as such, this instinct for life (which performs as an instinct for utterance) is a forceful impetus which operates as inseparable from its own impotence. This is analogous to the instinct for life incorporating the death drive, not by absorbing or integrating it within itself, but by allowing it to rest in its independent difference, in a detached attachment. Similarly, powerlessness, failure and impotence are reassessed and rearranged; instead of becoming the opposites of a successfully achieved expression, they are affirmed in the autonomy of their own scarcity.

But with this in mind, Beckett does not end here; rather, he further examines how utterance as writing can serve as an act of self-erasure and disappearance, of ‘un-writing’ oneself, and ultimately, as a death to the self. Again, he includes weakness as constituent to the process:

Weaker still the weak old voice that tried in vain to make me, dying away as much as to say it’s going from here to try elsewhere, or dying down, there’s no telling, as much as to say it’s going to cease, give up trying. No voice ever but it in my life, it says, if speaking of me one can speak of life, and it can, it still can, or if not of life, there it dies. If this, if that, if speaking of me, there it dies, but who can the greater can the less, once you’ve spoken of me you can speak of anything, up to the point where, up to the time when, there it dies, it can’t go on, it’s been its death, speaking of me, here or elsewhere, it says, it murmurs (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 337).

The greater and the less, the voice and its death, the murmurs and the silences are brought to a point of indiscernibility in their detached attachment. When utterance reaches its near end, it still speaks, because even in its own dissolution, it still finds an embodiment, thus, something always remains. Ultimately, even self-disappearance is enabled through the materiality of language, which allows the self to become an other, without descending into a dialectic of reciprocal dependence. The utterance endures through these manifestations of embodied engagements as a force of perseverance which generates the subject of enunciation.

From another perspective, Alain Badiou writes extensively on the relationship between the mind and the body in *On Beckett*, as well as on the constitutional parameters of the subject: ‘This ‘I’ is doubly closed: in the fixity of the body and in the persistence of a voice with neither answer nor echo, it endlessly persists in trying to find the path of its own identification’ (Badiou, 2003, p. 11). For Beckett, endurance entails the acts of self-writing as well as of self-erasure, of going on as well as failing, and thus does not presuppose a pre-fixed, pre-determined thinking subject which produces thoughts. On the contrary, if the *cogito* as the ‘thinking of the thinking’ keeps trying - and continues failing at - verbalizing its own source, its private void, it is because ‘for the *cogito*, all saying is precisely ‘ill saying’ because it can never come close to touching the void from out of which language speaks’ (Power, Toscano, 2003, p. xxi). The perseverance, as such, endures in the series of attempts as ‘ill saying’, and the *cogito* is ill-equipped to access the unnamable, which the language is attempting to grasp: ‘Whether I am words among words, or silence in the midst of silence’ (Beckett, 1958, p.

388). Ultimately, the *cogito*'s path is one of errancy, so rather than embracing a predetermined subject, we find Beckett embracing a lack of one. As he moves between being and non-being, silence, and utterance, he lingers in the space of faint murmurs. Yet there is no fixed *cogito* prior to these murmurs either, or before language, hence the latter can be viewed as one of the forces that undoes any pre-structured subjectivity. 'The silence, speak of the silence before going into it, was I there already, I don't know, at every instant I'm there, listen to me speaking of it, I knew it would come, I emerge from it to speak of it, I stay in it to speak of it, if it's I who speak, and it's not, I act as it were, sometimes I act as it were, but at length, was I ever there at length, a long stay, I understand nothing about duration' (Beckett, 1958, p. 407). Thus, it is through these encounters that the subject emerges as another force, not as a pre-established entity, but as a faint stirring which nonetheless endures. Despite the struggles, and through all the setbacks, the Unnamable's narration continues, and the language persists, although it constantly questions its own origins as well as its legitimacy, such that 'the texts train a merciless light on the mechanics of their own narrative becoming' (Boxall, 2015, p. 42). The subject arises within these endeavors, from the place where the Unnamable is unable to continue *or* to end, where Beckett's writing is caught in an incessant frenzy of utterance, and at once in its utter impossibility.

Little sounds come that demand nothing, ordain nothing, explain nothing, propound nothing, and the short necessary night is soon ended, and the sky blue again over all the secret places where nobody ever comes, the secret places never the same, but always simple and indifferent, always mere places, sites of a stirring beyond coming and going, of a being so light and free that it is as the being of nothing. How I feel it all again, after so long, here, and here, and in my hands, and in my eyes, like a face raised, a face offered (Beckett, 2006 b, p. 199, 200).

For Beckett, this *melée* is often physical, incorporated, in the eyes, the hands, the body, such that there is no thinking without the body, and there is no body without ontological perseverance. The force of the narrative and the impossibility of the narrative, the said and the un-said, is embodied in words and in silences and gaps. This force, which traverses Beckett's work, is the force of endurance, permeating both the said and the ill-said, the utterance and its failed attempts, the embodied enunciation as well as the incorporeal conditions of it. In this way, the powerlessness and the ignorance of the existing utterance is dependent on the immaterial, subsistent, never properly present

incorporeals, while the *conatus* serves as the mobilizing power that sustains their relationship.

6. *Silence and Utterance in Beckett's Late Prose and Drama.*

'But if I were silent the other sounds would start again, those to which the words have made me deaf, or which have really ceased' (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 320).

Beckett reflects comprehensively on the event of utterance, the inability or impossibility of utterance, and the terrain of solitude, which is the condition of them both. If this is the case in many of his texts, I will further examine here the notion of utterance especially in *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing*. In questioning the above relationships, and in reviewing the connection to the corporeal, Beckett is constantly trying to clarify the conditions for each one of them, as well as for their interconnectedness. 'There's going to be a departure, I'll be there, I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be there, I'll say I'm far from here, it won't be me, I won't say anything, there's going to be a story, someone is going to try and tell a story' (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 303). Moreover, Beckett analyses the process of questioning the foundations of his own attempts, as well as the failure to reach what he is questioning as such. Nothing stands firm and everything is under examination. Yet it is this examination that continues, as Beckett is unable to arrest its sheer persistence. The presence of the utterance that is immanently intertwined with its own impotence, the embodied enunciations that are contingent on the invisible, intangible, yet inescapable incorporeals, compel Beckett to remain in a constant state of inquiry. How can the relationship between the said and ill-said be defined, and how can it be resolved? 'Say for the said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid' (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 471). Beckett tries to approach this via different modes of bodily encounters, such as impaired eyesight (*Krapp's Last Tape*); immobility (*Happy Days*, *The Unnamable*), stasis and entropy (*Waiting for Godot*); with only voices (*All That Fall*, *Embers*); and the blankness of mere breathing (*Breath*). Beckett's writing remains physical, material, even in *Breath*, with a slowly increasing light, illuminating the breathing.

Beckett's concerns in *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing* are predominantly focused on the possibilities and impossibilities of utterance, on the saying and ill-

saying, the language and the silences, as well as on the edges between them. 'I want it to go silent, it wants to go silent, it can't, it does for a second, then it starts again, that's not the real silence, it says that's not the real silence, what can be said of the real silence, I don't know, that I don't know what it is, that there is no such thing, that perhaps there is such a thing, yes, perhaps there is, somewhere, I'll never know' (Beckett, 1958, p. 408). There are no straight lines, sharply dividing the said from the ill-said, or the utterance from silence, isolating one from another, rather, they are all connected in an attachment that exists not only despite the detachment from the other side, but because of it; a detached attachment materializes this interconnectedness of spaces of language with the territory of silence. And it is also a reminder of the dependence of all bodies to the incorporeal as their tacit but inexpressible conditions. In this way, detached attachment becomes symptomatic, such that every being, every *conatus* as a capacity for an embodied engagement is intertwined with others. The site of detachment in this way becomes the site of an encounter of different entities persevering in their being. In Beckett, this process materializes in the perpetual negotiation of (failed) utterance and silence, as well as between the thought and the body, the mind and the material.

Estragon: In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

Vladimir: You are right, we're inexhaustible.

E: It's so we won't think.

V: We have that excuse.

E: It's so we won't hear.

V: We have our reasons.

E: All the dead voices.

V: They make a noise like wings.

E: Like leaves.

V: Like sand.

E: Like leaves.

Silence.

V: They all speak at once.

E: Each one to itself.

Silence.

V: Rather they whisper.

E: They rustle.

V: They murmur.

E: They rustle.

Silence (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 40, 41).

The relentlessly persevering voice is again attempting to speak and write or failing at this and simply trying to continue. As such, utterance is always embodied, in leaves or sand, on paper, in whispers and murmurs, and in its own powerlessness, in the failure of the ill-said, it performs as another mode of the incorporeal. Being inexhaustible enables Estragon and Vladimir to remain outside of the Cartesian mind and move into the embodied thinking of the voices.

The Unnamable concludes with the commitment to endurance, despite the incapability to continue, or strength to persist, so the imperative of endurance becomes the sole origin of its own process; the *conatus* of endurance. Written in the same post-war period as the trilogy are Beckett's three stories *The Expelled*, *The Calmative*, and *The End* are added to *Texts for Nothing* (1967) in a collection which marks the conclusion of the middle or the post-war period of his writing. Beckett permanently discards the defined narrative and coherent logical structures; instead, and with determination, he convenes the voices in the space of utterance as imminent and inescapable, and increasingly independent. 'I'm the clerk, I'm the scribe, at the hearings of what cause I know not. Why want it to be mine, I don't want it' (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 309). The utterance becomes a sovereign entity, with unquestionable persistence and indestructible continuity, independent from a narrating subject. Beckett reiterates this in the last text of this period, *How It Is*, which, famously, ends with a dying 'I':

so things may change no answer I may choke now answer sink no answer sully
the mud no more no answer the dark no answer trouble the peace no more no
answer the silence no answer die no answer DIE screams I MAY DIE screams I
SHALL DIE screams good
good good end at last of part three and last that's how it was end of quotation after
Pim how it is (Beckett, 1964, p. 147).

The relentless voice provides a forceful motor for the narrating utterance that is navigating a relationship with Pim, while also manoeuvring its way through mud. The oozing mud and the failed connection to Pim both act as delegates of its subjectivity, while simultaneously demonstrating its disintegration. Thus, *How It Is* works as another enactment of the failure of recognition by the other, most obviously on the level of the narrating voice, whose identification with the voice of the 'I' continually miscarries. This is further reflected in the relationship with Pim which serves as the structural foundation of the text, dividing it into three parts: before Pim, with Pim, and after Pim. The voice may be faint, but it is persistent through these encounters of failed

recognition. Instead of determining a subject as the narrator identified with the voice, Beckett recognises the voice as a process in which the boundaries between one and another, the interior and exterior, the mind and the body, the voice and the mud, are blurred. 'He's coming I'll have a voice no voice in the world but mine a murmur had a life up above down here I'll see my things again a little blue in the mud a little white our things little scenes skies especially and paths' (Beckett, 1964, p. 76). The blurring of the boundaries and the oozing of the mud find their rendering in the text that obscures the line between prose and fiction, utterance and silence, the voice and its inability to identify the relationship between the uttering and the uttered, the subject and its object: 'hard to believe too yes that I have a voice yes in me yes when the panting stops yes not at other times no and that I murmur yes I yes in the dark yes in the mud yes for nothing yes I yes but it must be believed yes' (Beckett, 1964, p. 145). The mud thickens, Pim leaves, the narrative that was created is dis-integrated, and the voice remains dis-identified and de-individuated, yet persistent.

Another one of Beckett's most engaging examples of an enduring voice from his late plays is *Footfalls*, a brief yet stunning play where the main character, akin more to a ghost than a human, is leading an exchange with a female voice, her (possibly dead) mother. Immediately, and notwithstanding the relationship of a ghost and a voice, the interrelation between them is set in bodily terms: 'Strip: downstage, parallel with front, length seven steps, width one metre, a little centre audience right' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 399). This is followed by instructions for May's systematic and geometrically specific pacing, a rhythmic striding of the left and the right, which introduces and simultaneously anchors May's body on stage, in the text, as well as in the world. It also imbeds it within the relationship between a daughter and a mother, which is ultimately a conversation between a ghost and an imaginary voice, or two voices, embodied in the metronomic pacing, the intermittent bell ringing, and the light, focusing on May's feet.

May: I mean, Mother, that I must hear the feet, however faintly they fall.

The mother: The motion alone is not enough?

May: No, Mother, the motion alone is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faintly they fall (*Pause. M resumes pacing. With pacing.*) (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 401).

The sound of the feet, which follow a metronomic rhythm, grants May her presence which is otherwise uncertain, as she herself repeatedly declares: 'I was not there' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 403). It is only when she hears her feet creating a sound as they

connect with the floor³¹, that she can endure her own existence, as if it is this sound, together with her mother's voice, that guarantees her being. Throughout the play, it is unclear whether either protagonist really exists, with May having a semblance of a ghostly existence, while the mother's is reduced to a voice, possibly a creation of May's mind. Either way, the daughter's differentiation from her mother is clearly an unresolved process, and the voice itself is disembodied. In an endless process of attempted appropriation, the rhythms of their verbal exchanges are correlated with the rhythms of May's feet, which are consequently delineating her own existence. 'Where is she, it may be asked' (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 401). With the line between the past and the present ambiguous, with her existence attached to only a trace, she *is* only in the sounds of her feet, the sound of her mother's voice, the chime, and all the echoes. With the voice itself now completely disembodied, certainty can only be found in the endurance of Beckett's writing on the five pages of this play, and in their presence when spoken on stage.

7. *An Addendum to Disembodied Utterance and the Incorporeal.*

I have sought to examine utterance and writing as forms of endurance, as well as their embodiments and engagements. For Beckett, the corporeal practices which his earlier works illustrate with the descriptions of various bodily functions, movements, disabilities, hunger, and physical abuse, are regulated by the incorporeal. In the trilogy, he systematically depersonalizes the novels and progressively strips away everything, apart from utterance itself. Yet the process of disembodiment is not completed with the Unnamable, who still exists as an emblem of a body, although severely diminished; the voice continues as a corporeal entity, and it is not until the late prose and drama that Beckett starts exploring the provenance, the conditions, and the amplitude of a disembodied utterance. And to achieve this, he again turns to what is outside, beyond or prior to the corporeal, the incorporeal. I have examined the Stoic definition of the incorporeal earlier in this dissertation, but I would like to further explore the

³¹ For this purpose, when directing the first production of the play, Beckett had sandpaper attached to the actress' feet.

specificities of Beckett's approach to the relationship between the disembodied utterance and the incorporeal.

Some of the invisible vehicles for utterance are echoes, dead voices, or the referenced events, and on the outermost margin of corporeality, bordering on the incorporeal, there is breath:

what?... the buzzing?... yes... all the time the buzzing... dull roar... in the skull... and the beam... ferreting around... painless... so far... ha!... so far... then thinking... oh long after... sudden flash... perhaps something she had to... tell... (Beckett, 2006 a, p. 381).

Beckett examines this limit between the corporeal and the incorporeal comprehensively in his late plays, and his investigations are supported by the Stoics' description of the incorporeal as subsistent rather than existent, thus never fully present. The incorporeals do not interact directly with bodies, yet it is impossible to contemplate bodies without these conditions (that allow them to embody themselves). Beckett, in a similar manner, often builds his plays on the foundations that are never brought into existence.

On back to unsay void can go. Void cannot go. Save dim go. Then all go. All not already gone. Till dim back. Then all back. All not still gone. The one can go. The twain can go. Dim can go. Void cannot go. Save dim go. Then all go (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 475).

The unspoken events, the unidentified space and time, the tacit and inferred desires, the echoes, the empty spaces, or perhaps most famously, Godot, a key but missing character, whose identity and whereabouts are an enigma. It is only because these foundations remain immaterial, and in as much as they persist as subsistent, while never existing, that these plays can stand on stage and on paper as embodied utterance of the enduring voice.

Ultimately, this enables Beckett to investigate the limits of corporeality itself, especially in *Worstward Ho*, where he follows the processes of dimming, lessening, and worsening that culminate in the ultimate 'nohow on'. At this point, existence and nothingness converge, the corporeal residues of the dim light meet with the incorporeal void.

Less. Less seeing. Less seen and seeing when with words than when not. When somehow than when nohow. Stare by words dimmed. Shades dimmed. Void dimmed. Dim dimmed. All there as when no words. As when nohow. Only all

dimmed. Till blank again. Now words again. Nohow again. Then all undimmed (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 482).

At the juncture of the corporeal with the incorporeal, with both exhausted to their limits, the utterance is unable to proceed with words. But instead of complete nothingness and final silence, uttering endures in other forms; Beckett moves to music, silence, images, structured geometrical spaces, recorded voices, and mechanical movements. Utterance, thus, finding new forms of expression, goes on, and the corporeal and the incorporeal in their constant exchanges constitute a new subjectivity which is trying to enunciate its own enduring being. And if Beckett's earlier texts were grounded unequivocally in the impaired bodies, Beckett's late writings offer a different rendition of subjectivity. In the early texts, the voice serves as a vehicle for the self which is incorporated in a dysfunctional or diseased body, while in his later prose and plays, the voice continues uttering without the body. Whether failed or died, for utterance as a process, the physical body is not needed anymore as a placeholder for the voice. Using the senses like hearing, touching, vision and smell, as well as prostheses, Beckett widens the boundaries of what the body can do, and with this, he enables the subjectivity to embed itself outside of the incarnate body. In TV and film images, in sounds, in disembodied voices, in movement as an embodied pattern of uttering, or in other audible and visual traces, the voice of the self can be found in fragmented remnants of corporeality, always intertwined with the incorporeal.

8. *Repetition and Dying as a Mode of Living. The Death Drive.*

'Saying is inventing' (Beckett, 1958, p. 32).

One of the mechanisms found across Beckett's oeuvre which explicates many other concepts is repetition. It serves as one of his most frequently used and most comprehensively applied techniques, with its wide-ranging applicability and function. The subject of repetition has been examined widely within the Beckett studies³², but here we might nonetheless consider persistent utterance as a form of endurance, as well

³² Steven Connor's *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* is perhaps the most comprehensive study of repetition in Beckett's writing.

as of subjectivity in a constant pursuit of self-enunciation. As I have indicated, both utterance and subjectivity in Beckett's writing are sometimes presented as embodied and delineated by the corporeal, and other times outside of the physical; in both instances, repetition serves him as a technique he employs to extend the perimeters of the scope of utterance.

The most evident manifestation of utterance is writing, which often acts as twofold, once as Beckett's own writing, and again as the writing of one of his characters. As such, writing is always a form of repetition of speech, or an attempt of containing the elusive sensations, affects or events of signification. The insufficiencies of signification are painstakingly exercised in *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*, with pencils and sticks both utilized as tools to retrieve the words and notebooks into presence. Of course, despite the repeated attempts, the surrogates fail: 'this time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, then I think it will be over, with that world too. Premonition of the last but one but one' (Beckett, 1958, p. 8). There is always something that eludes, the written representations are lacking, and the original cannot be repeated. This is the space of Deleuze's complex repetition which is not bound to repeating the same or the original, but is active and productive, opening a path to new variations. For Beckett, this type of repetition leads him to constantly adding, subtracting, reducing, and rewriting. For *Molloy*, it means that nothing written is final or completed, and every end leads to a new beginning, as in *Molloy*'s famous last lines: 'Then I went back to the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining' (Beckett, 1958, p. 176). Together with addition, subtraction and reduction, Beckett uses repetition, affirmation, and negation to give the voice of utterance always another version of a narrative, in order to persevere through the arduousness of enunciation. He utilizes these tools throughout his writing career, and he applies them generously; perhaps most obviously to his characters' bodies and their senses, but also to the staging of his texts, the narratives, the actions, and ultimately the phrasing and the language itself.

The most instantaneously recognizable repetitions that we encounter in Beckett's characters are perhaps the permutations, which Deleuze links to a process of exhausting the possible. The notable examples are *Molloy* sucking the stones while elaborately shifting them from one pocket to another, and *Murphy* trying to calculate the best distribution for his biscuits. For *Watt*, permutations, calculated probabilities,

predictable sequencing, and systemic patterns serve as fundamental prerequisites for a semblance of a stable existence. Yet none of them offer a refuge from the irresolution of the self which as it confronts the not-self, nothingness, and ultimately, death. Other modes of permutations include shifting between speakers and narrators (for instance in *The Unnamable*, the voice finds its delegates in Basil, Worm, Mahood, and others), again with the aim of finding a coherent identity, a stable self. But this fails yet again as the unceasing utterance is always enduring, while never being able to identify itself with a narrator.

the end begins, you go silent, it's the end, short-lived, you begin again, you had forgotten, there's someone there, someone talking to you, about you, about him, then a second, then a third, then the second again, then all three together, these figures just to give you an idea, talking to you, about you, about them, all I have to do is listen, then they depart, one by one, and the voice goes on, it's not theirs, they were never there (Beckett, 1958, p. 394).

In the absence of a physical body that the Unnamable exists in, the voice of utterance relies on the substitutes and on the repetition in its search for self, but also in its awareness that the unified self is not within its reach. In parallel to the voice's process of subtracting and reducing, there is a clarity about its own impotence as well as its own irrevocability. While the uttering voice keeps a distance from its surrogates, as well as from its own permanence and anchoring, there is still a firm resolve that the utterance endures, nonetheless. 'I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. No one compels me, there is no one, it's an accident, a fact' (Beckett, 1958, p. 314). The imperative to utter is itself a form of repetition which resists all possible annihilation, and it operates as a type of compulsion, also from the space of imperceptibility and departicularisation. The voice as a placeholder for a new type of subjectivity serves as an act or a process, rather than a fixed, pre-existing, and pre-determined substance. We can recognise this subjectivity by its opacity and fluidity, not by its cohesion or constancy. The origin of the voice is always eluding both Beckett and his characters. Its modification from the corporeal to the incorporeal has already been established, the reduction and subtraction are in constant operation, the narrators are shifting, then failing, the self is invariably facing the not-self, its own impotence, nothingness. 'He thinks words fail him, he thinks because words fail him he's on his way to my speechlessness, to being speechless with my speechlessness, he would like it to be my fault that words fail him, of course words

fail him. He tells his story every five minutes, saying it is not his, there's cleverness for you' (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 307). What is left is the unremitting process of utterance as an act of impersonal communication between different forces, which can be embodied but also disembodied, human or inhuman, existing or subsisting, but which cannot be fixed in their conceptual representations.

Repetition, and in some cases repetition compulsion, serves as a uniting force, creating a semblance of an otherwise missing centre. In this way, repetition can also act as the process of relating the encounters of the corporeal to the incorporeal. Murphy's repeated rocking in the chair, which is mirrored in the novel's verbal repetitions, and punctuated by Beckett's reiterations, give a steady rhythm to Murphy's otherwise unsettled existence; Vladimir and Estragon's days and nights keep arriving in repetitive cycles; Watt's compulsive practice of classifying helps consolidate his sensations; Molloy's shifting the repeats of sucking the stones enacts a bodily need; Krapp strives to reconcile his present and his past by rewinding and repeating the same recording. The examples are ominous, they come in different forms and modalities, and they operate on the level of words, sounds, gestures, light, scenery, silences, and more. They act as stabilizing factors and as connective tissue between the corporeal and the incorporeal, enabling the utterance to continue, while also allowing the uttering self to sustain itself.

Thus, the voice may start by stating its own position, questioning it soon after, shifting it, then negating it all together. Other times, the voice returns to the repetitions of the specific narratives, people, or places, but ends up dismissing and displacing them, too. The search for a self is anchored in the search for unity, and repetitions are utilized as a device that would enable the voice to persevere in its enunciation despite and throughout the affirmations, negations, and variations. But as the voice is conditioned and constituted by the repetitions, it cannot dislodge the self from them, while at the same time, the repetitions fail to achieve the final unification, and with that, the ultimate resolution. The repetitions, initially promising stability, miscarry on their promise; a fixed self and a stable utterance are impossible to attain. This is perhaps most obvious in *The Unnamable*, where the multitude of voices, murmurs, sounds, but also interruptions and silences create an utterance which cannot be welded to a consistent, permanent self. 'It is I invented him, him and so many others, and the places where they passed, the places where they stayed in, in order to speak, since I had to speak, without speaking of me, I couldn't speak of me, I was never told I had to speak of me, I invented my

memories, not knowing what I was doing, not one is of me' (Beckett, 1958, p. 396). Rather, what persists is an imperative of uttering, a compulsiveness to continue enunciating, despite the powerlessness and the failures.

Writing itself serves as a mode of repetition of this persevering utterance, affirming the writing self in its power, but also in its impotence. The uttering voice is always oscillating between the representations of the self ('to tell the truth, I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on, I believe we are all here' (Beckett, 1958, p. 293)) and the encounters with the not-self, between the embodied encounters and their incorporeal conditions. But in this process of finding substitutes as representatives ('I can see them still, my delegates' (Beckett, 1958, p. 297)), it still tries to distance itself, and as it realises the futility of these attempts, it lets them go. 'Then they depart, one by one, and the voice goes on, it's not theirs, they were never there, there was never anyone but you, talking to you about you' (Beckett, 1958, p. 394). As a transcribed form of utterance, with an unplaceable voice, writing becomes self-writing, and self-erasure. If repetition serves as evidence of existence (the best example being Krapp), writing becomes another form of repeating the utterance and transferring it onto paper. And as early as in *Texts for Nothing*, Beckett invites and incorporates into the writing not only the voice's utterance, together with the gaps, silences, and cessations, but also the readers as co-creators, and ultimately, the writing itself. And with this, he creates a subjectivity which is not found in the narrator who writes or speaks the language, and not in the language itself, but rather in the practice of enduring in this complex utterance.

The imperative demanding to utter is ultimately faced with the limitations imposed by death. 'To speak one's own death is to speak the moment of absolute incapacity, to attempt to extend the control of the self even as it vanishes into the non-being' (Connor, 2007, p. 194). Yet by the end of *Malone Dies*, there are no self, or 'I' left, so utterance itself becomes a tool for mastering death, with repetitions again utilized as instruments for maintaining utterance, even on the edge of being as it is nearing non-being. But for Beckett, this edge does not lead to the end of utterance; rather, and similarly to Hegel's reminder that we maintain our own being in death, this opens a new terrain for enunciation, one where endurance of persisting utterance converges with the idea of its complete demise, which prompts another visit to Freud's battle of the instincts of life and death. Despite the initial juxtaposition of the instincts,

Freud ultimately regards dying as a form of living, not as the end of it; as a mode of pure survival, not as the final abyss into nothingness which stands opposite the wholeness of life. In this way, Malone's narration of his own process of dying represents an affirmation of life *in* dying, and writing must continue for the narrator to persevere in life, to reach the primary goal, which is dying. But if narration is fuelling and sustaining life, and if dying is the final experience of living, then death can only come as narrated, and thus narration simultaneously keeps death at bay, as well as enables it as 'it promises the narrator to 'die alive', to experience his own death, to live through to its limit' (Weller, 2005, p. 103). Yet, as we know, *Malone Dies* does not perform the death of utterance; after a long pause, Beckett returns with a disembodied utterance of *The Unnamable* and its enduring, unremitting voice, questioning, repeating, subtracting itself, surrendering to its avatars, denouncing its self, negating its own positions, and finally finding itself in the process of repetition, in the performance of the imperative to utter. 'Born of the impossible voice the unmakeable being' (Beckett, 2006 c, p. 339).

In the bareness of life and on the threshold of death, the interminable endurance of the writing and uttering voice delineates Beckett's work, and, as I will elucidate in the next two chapters, the work of Agota Kristof and J. M. Coetzee. Commencing from *cogito nescio* (the ignorant, unknowing, or impotent cogito) rather than *cogito ergo sum* (the cogito of reason and certainty), failure rather than knowledge, Beckett disrupts the primacy of the thinking intellect. Instead of the pursuit of certainty, he advocates powerlessness, instead of the mind, the body. He examines the peripheries of being, but also the edges of non-being, he follows utterance to its end, and investigates its inability and its powerlessness. Recognizing (ill-)utterance as a body, he explores its conditions and discovers the realm of the incorporeal as the prerequisite for the corporeal; in inquiring about life, he discovers it in death; just as saying is always neighbouring on ill-saying, and being on non-being, living verges on dying. Remaining on the surface allows Beckett to connect to all sides, without prioritising one over another, while acknowledging them all. In this way, surface and depth, body and mind, inside and outside can function inter-actively without mutual subjection. Withholding assent to

dominance, whether of the intellect over the body, of knowledge over ignorance, or of mastery over bondage, initiates an ethical stand of detached attachment. As a position of equality which can be universalized, this allows each singularity to remain autonomous and authentic in its particularity and difference, without appropriation, suppression, or incorporation of the other. This enables the anethics of endurance as predicated on a secular fortitude, on the physical strength to withhold assent or to affirm, but to nonetheless go on. Thus, for Beckett, but also for Kristof and Coetzee, withholding assent becomes an imperative that leads to detached attachment as the foundation for an anethics of endurance.

Chapter Two

Anethics and the Materialities of Survival in Agota Kristof

Introduction.

Like Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee, Hungarian novelist Agota Kristof offers, in her early plays, her own trilogy of novels (*The Notebook*, *The Proof*, *The Third Lie*), in the short novel *Yesterday*, and in her autobiographical novel *The Illiterate*, a series of stark and often brutal scenes of endurance, in which her characters face seemingly unbearable conditions. In a manner again similar to Beckett and Coetzee, Kristof's austere style of writing directly relates to the starkness of her content. Her subtractive prose performs the nullification or even disappearance of her characters and her 'autobiographical' material is not used to put her life experience into a definite form, so much as to allow it to become imperceptible: de-personalized, de-particularized, indefinite, if not erased³³. It is in the light of this process of becoming-imperceptible that we can understand Kristof's liminal figures of endurance and, in turn, explore how she dramatizes the uncertain borderline between ethics and anethics.

This is manifested particularly in her first and most notable novel *The Notebook* (1986), which I will take as the primary focus of my examination of anethics of endurance that affirms the material forces and events of embodied engagement with others which serve as the base for this type of ethics. Anethics traces bare life as a creative force that is in everything, its *conatus* that initiates the action to generate, and to change. As we have seen in terms of Beckett's writing, the two central concepts I wish to further illustrate in this study of anethics of endurance are the Stoic notion of withholding assent which serves as an ethical maxim, a guiding post that directs us to the position of detached attachment as a mode of living and relating to others. These are

³³ Or, in Deleuze's words: 'Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience.... Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or -vegetable, becomes-molecule, to the point of becoming imperceptible' (Deleuze, 1997 b, p. 255).

most perspicuously embodied in Kristof's main characters in *The Notebook*, the twins, who practice strenuous exercises in self-mastery that enable them to desensitize from pain and disengage from the dialectic of mutual recognition, as well as from other forms of mastery, ultimately achieving a practice of withholding assent as a sort of ethical mandate or maxim. This mandate presents itself in an engaged yet non-reactive comportment towards others, and in a non-responsiveness to external stimuli which is characterised by a deliberate and active disengagement, not by the passivity of *apatheia*. In this way, withholding assent operates as the practice of an ethical maxim, insofar as it enables the ethical position of detached attachment. Together, they further develop the concept of anethics as I explore it within endurance and in the works of Kristof.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will trace several modalities of encounters of endurance that are predicated on the corporeal: (1) withholding assent as an active practice of an ethical mandate of deliberate non-responsivity; (2) detached attachment as an ethical position and conduct of life, in which external forces and affects can be held simultaneously in their difference, as well as in their singularity; (3) and self-writing and self-erasure as forms of endurance which lead to new forms of subjectivity that are established through collaborative acts. *The Notebook* provides a barren scenography for the three modalities of encounters to unfold; and, as I will seek to show, through the twins' often torturous struggles for survival, it ultimately offers a different mode of ethics as an anethics of endurance. Delineating anethics at the limits of imperceptibility, bare survival, and the desire for life as conterminous with death, may approach, I want to argue, a new conceptualization of subjectivity that is not only predicated on corporeal forces, but also on their incorporeal conditions, and that furthermore undoes the dialectic of alterity and mastery that has often shaped ethical discourse.

Unlike Beckett and Coetzee, Kristof's work has remained relatively unknown. Since *The Notebook*, the first book of the trilogy, will serve as this chapter's primary text, I will begin with a condensed synopsis of the novel in order to develop my ethical and philosophical inquiry of her writing. The title itself suggests that the text is structured as a school exercise book, and indeed, the main protagonists, the twins, adhere to the basic principles of school practice in writing. Kristof performs this on the level of voice, structure as well as style. The simple, often matter-of-fact prose is meant to cohere with the pre-adolescent twins' simple worldview, a worldview told through a narrative 'we'. In their notebook, there is always a short, simple chapter title describing

succinctly the chapter's main events, their exercises, the other characters, the surroundings, or their challenges. This starts with 'Arrival at Grandmother's', and is followed with 'Our Tasks', 'Exercise to Toughen the Body', 'Exercises to Toughen the Mind', 'School', 'Exercise in Cruelty', 'Winter', 'The Batman', 'The Policeman', 'Harelip', 'The Housekeeper', 'The Human Herd', and concludes with the final 'Separation'. The novel's chapters are sparse and concise, as are its sentences. 'Grandmother often hits us, with her bony hands, a broom, or a damp cloth. She pulls our ears and catches us by the hair. Other people also hit and kick us, we don't even know why. The blows hurt and make us cry. Falls, scratches, cuts, work, cold and heat can also cause pain. We decide to toughen our bodies in order to be able to bear the pain without crying' (Kristof, 1997, p. 16). If the simplicity of the structure, the restraint with which the vocabulary is used, and the elementary grammar all contribute to a sense that we are indeed reading a child's exercise notebook, Kristof's content is stark and distressing. The writing exercises serve as a cognitive parallel to the twins' physical training, as well as to their striving for discipline in emotional detachment. All are done in an efficiently structured manner, and the exercises are anti-sentimental, void of feelings or personal involvement. They are succinct and limited to what is necessary for the practice. To this end, Kristof's ascetic language comes as the result of a lengthy process of rewriting and deleting, of editing and subtracting. In a 2011 interview, shortly before her death, she recounted that 'while I was writing, I was constantly deleting as well. I deleted a lot, especially adjectives and things that are not real, that have their origin in feelings' (Hungarian Literature Online, 2011). This specific, attenuated language, void of all stylistic surfeit is distinctive of Kristof, and brings her close to Beckett's and Coetzee's manners of writing. Although each of their styles is unique, they share a common commitment to a language of scarcity.

This scarcity is further reflected in the Kristof's nameless characters, referred to only by their roles: mother, grandmother, deserter, priest, housekeeper, Harelip, officer, batman, father; it is not who they are, but what they do that matters. This anonymity contributes to a sense of interchangeability, as main characters and events are constructed and reconstructed, then shifted and recreated in the subsequent two books of the trilogy. Kristof continues with disappearance of one of the characters, then with re-emergence, reinvention, and ultimately blurring of characters, narratives, and subject positions. In *The Notebook*, as such, the twins are never named, and their identities

remain interchangeable. We nonetheless learn that they are young boys, probably aged about ten, but they function, at least until their separation, as a plural-singular 'we' that puts pressure on individualized notions of identity and subjectivity. Kristof marks their speech with an almost refrain-like 'We say:' 'We ask:' 'We answer'. The novel revolves around the twins' creation of new identities through exercises in (doubled) self-mastery. 'We work, we study, we do exercises' (Kristof, 1997, p. 113). They are a twofold self³⁴, speaking and moving, witnessing and enduring as one. In this, they recall Freud's notion of the double (attributed to his student Otto Rank), which states that 'the 'double' was originally an insurance against the extinction of the self', an 'energetic denial of the power of death' (Freud, 2003, p. 142). In their mutual and often blurred endurance, the twins embody 'the invention of such doubling as a defence against annihilation' (Freud, 2003, p. 142). And as such, they act as embodiments of the instinct of death itself, so that the instinct of life and the instinct of death are held together in their own distinctiveness as well as in their independence from one another, yet interweaved in a way that is analogous to the intertwined twins. 'It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm' (Freud, 1961, p. 49). Subjectivity is formed within this rhythm of interweaving, transforming the twins' mode of existence, such that their being is created within the movements of these inter-changes.

As a depersonalized rewriting of Kristof's personal escape from the Soviet-occupied Hungary, *The Notebook* is also a story of endurance and survival. Kristof's novelistic terrains chart a Europe ravaged by war, devastation, and extreme deprivation. Similarly to Coetzee in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Kristof does not offer locating details or place names, such that the non-specific and non-historical setting allows for the novel to work beyond the imposing constraints of historical or geographical particularities. 'I do not state where it is happening or to whom. I did not want to name anything' (Hungarian Literature Online, 2006). What is clear is that the novel is set in the uncertain borderlands of an emergent geopolitical reality, and that a sense of alienation pervades the characters' sensibilities. The twins are themselves frontier exiles, and foreign soldiers arrive as an occupying force. As the border accentuates the awareness of their consolidated identity in contrast to the outside world, it also signifies

³⁴ In French, the word 'jumeau' means both twin and double.

a sense of isolation, the seclusion of their unity within the confines of an exteriorized realm.

We discover that the twins' mother is alienated from their misanthropic grandmother, who had most likely poisoned her husband, their grandfather. The grandmother is immediately unwelcoming of the boys and soon submits them to repeated acts of cruelty. The twins, through one of their methods of survival, undertake to write the notebook, which they hide in the attic, their reclusive space of surveillance. From there, they spy on the lodger, a foreign army officer who rents the room in grandmother's house together with his batman, and while the twins form relationships with both men, the officer sexually exploits them. This is not the only instance of sexual abuse that the boys experience; the priest's housekeeper also disguises sexual exploitation as acts of care and kindness for the twins, and the book testifies to a series of adults failing in their roles as the children's guardians. This contributes to the boys' distrust in adults, and reinforces their sense of self-sufficiency, self-determination, and self-governance. By the time the horrors of war reach their town, the boys are already desensitized to the people and events around them; this is not the state of the Stoic *apatheia*, where one is free of emotions and rationally chooses a response of equanimity. For the twins, desensitization is a necessary requirement that leads to a detachment which enables them to separate from the surrounding environment, with the pages of the notebook serving as intangible strands connecting them to their milieu, while simultaneously facilitating disengagement. The notebook serves as a material placeholder for the encounters with themselves, with each other, and with their community. It also functions as type of a retainer, a tool which facilitates their practice of desensitization, and an indispensable apparatus for the period of adaptation.

Kristof's *Notebook* has only recently begun to receive critical and philosophical attention, as can be evinced from interest by Gabriel Josipovici and Slavoj Žižek. Josipovici claims to see beneath the surface of Kristof's austere style and brutal scenography an honest picture of 'deep humanity'. In 'On Agota Kristof' he writes, 'the utter simplicity of the style, the clarity, the unflinching gaze at a world far removed from any I had experienced and yet curiously familiar – that of a peasant culture on the border of what we take to be Hungary and Germany³⁵ in the dying moments of World

³⁵ Josipovici is referring to Hungary during and after World War II. Today, Hungary does not share a border with Germany, but rather with Austria.

War II – and the deep humanity underlying it all, took my breath away’ (Josipovici, 2014, p. vii). Žižek, from another perspective, finds in Kristof’s fiction an ethics of endurance that is without sentimentality and empathy, an ethics in which ‘cold and cruel passion’ replaces the reciprocity of otherness with ‘disgusting proximity’. For Žižek, with characteristic perversity, it is the ethical model for exactly how he wants to live. In his brief ‘Afterword’ to the novel’s English translation, Žižek lauds the twins as exemplary ethical subjects: ‘The twins are immoral – they lie, blackmail, kill – yet they stand for authentic ethical naivety at its purest’ (Žižek, 2014, p. 163). They are in direct contrast to their torturers, then: ‘Torturers are not beyond good and evil, they are beneath it. They do not heroically transgress our shared ethical rules, they simply lack them’ (Žižek, 2014, p. 165). As such, they become, if sardonically, models for Žižek of ethical behaviour: ‘This is where I stand, how I would love to be: an ethical monster without empathy, doing just what is to be done in a weird coincidence of blind spontaneity and reflexive distance, helping others while avoiding their disgusting proximity. With more people like this, the world would have been a pleasant place in which sentimentality would be replaced by a cold and cruel passion’ (Žižek, 2014, p. 166, 167).

Despite Žižek’s characterization of the twins as enacting a detached ethical anti-sentimentality, or even ethical monstrosity in terms of the workings of cold and cruel passions, what emerges in *The Notebook* is not merely a dramatization of ethical subjectivity shorn of morality or enacted from a distance. Rather, as I wish to argue here, Kristof’s ethics emerges as a question of materiality – the sheer materiality of survival, or a physicalisation of the very ground of ethics. To be sure, we find, as in Beckett, an ethics poised at its material and affective limits. But in *The Notebook*, Kristof foregrounds how ethics approaches a catastrophic point at which it becomes an anethics of bare survival. Put differently, Kristof challenges us to think of the threshold at which an ethics of endurance becomes an anethics of survival. The novel seems to be driven by the question of what happens to ethical subjectivity in such desolate conditions in which mere survival is at stake.

Here, to begin to answer, I would like to further explore how Kristof’s work raises key questions for developing an ethics of endurance within the extreme circumstances that her characters face, namely radical vulnerability, violence, and disappearance. Despite horrific conditions she describes, Kristof does not directly pose

these questions against the backdrop of any kind of metaphysics of good or evil, or even, as might Levinas, as limit cases of an ethics of alterity. This is not an ethics of mutual recognition in Hegelian terms, either, where one's subjectivity comes into being through the intersubjective relations, determined and depended on another's. Instead, and this is central to what I will argue, she develops her ethics in terms of sheer materialities of encounter: in terms of the spasmodic violence of bodies in conflict, and the methods one might undertake to withstand such affronts; in terms of the hunger if not starvation of bodies begging for sustenance; of sexual desire reduced to appetite and the power of exploitation; of bodies eviscerated by separation and loss, or dismembered and discarded. This is the space of anethics as a practice of the corporeal and material forces encountering each other as acts and energies, not as self and other, as capacities for embodied engagements, not pre-established subjects on a quest for mutual recognition.

To unfold this further, I will organize this chapter in four main parts. Firstly, I will address the role of the 'exercises' for the body and the mind, and examine Kristof's interpretation of *askēsis*, its links to endurance, as well as to forms of mastery. As I suggest, we can consider the ethical implications of the ascetic exercises Kristof's twins perform in *The Notebook* in terms of the material ethics of self-preservation, with the goal of desensitization and emotional detachment. But establishing ethics on the foundations of corporeal forces entails withdrawing subjectification from all dependency on reciprocal recognition, which leads to a rejection of ethics of alterity as such. Thus, while their notebook is used as a tool for self-betterment, a site for self-writing, and a document of self-discipline, it also serves as a means to withholding assent to dependence on others as an act of deliberate non-responsivity. However, while at first glance the twins' practices resemble the Stoic practices of 'care of the self' (themselves seminally analysed in Foucault's late work), ultimately Kristof offers a caustic rendition of the term *askēsis* in relation to ethical action: one that removes any teleology of ethical virtue or deontology of moral duty. Thus, I will explore how, despite this, the Stoic notion of withholding can further illuminate the manner in which the twins strive to endure, and in turn how such a withholding relates to the event of ethics as a practice of survival. Further, I will explore writing as an avenue for desensitization and detached attachment, and the notebook as a structure for self-creation, as well as for self-erasure. As I seek to show, Kristof's subtractive style is not

only consonant with the austere terrains through which the twins move, the ascetic practices they undertake, or their manner of withholding recognition from the others they encounter, but also performs a concept of language that is itself desensitizing. As the twins harden their bodies to withstand the blows of others, their minds to withstand the psychological abuse to which they are subjected, or their sensation to block out the scenes of horror they witness or perform, they also work to shear away the ability of words themselves to wound, or, taking this to a certain extreme, the ability of language to deliver meaning altogether. Consequently, their notebook writing exercises work simultaneously as means for self-creation, self-preservation, and self-erasure. But their well-established ethical structure becomes disrupted in the scene with the human herd (which I will examine in more detail later), as it brings into the forefront the challenges of ethical engagement, charity, mastery, dehumanization, while magnifying the multitude of violent encounters and the different materialities of survival. Here, I want to consider how this disruption affects the position, formation, and expression of subjectivity. Lastly, in conclusion, I will briefly look at the other two books in Kristof's trilogy to outline how they build on the ethico-philosophical foundations established in *The Notebook*.

1. *Askēsis, Repetition, (Self-)Mastery, and Endurance.*

Commencing yet again from the principle that corporeality consists in activity and conveys itself in processes, we can observe physical beings as embodying rational principles, and following this Stoic framework, the primary principle becomes *dunamis* as a potential power, a drive, or a force. It is from this commitment to embodied engagements between forces that the twins embark on a regiment of exercises, mirrored in Kristof's chapter titles: 'Exercise to Toughen the Body', 'Exercises to Toughen the Mind', 'Exercise in Begging', 'Exercise in Fasting', or 'Exercise in Cruelty'. They strengthen their bodies to be able to withstand the beatings of their grandmother and others, to no longer cry and no longer give in to the thought of physical pain. 'We decide to toughen our bodies in order to be able to bear pain without crying. We start by hitting and punching one another' (Kristof, 1997, p. 16). When asked by the grandmother why they are doing this, and if they had a fight, they reply simply 'For

nothing, grandmother. Don't worry it's only an exercise' (Kristof, 1997, p. 16). As they continue:

We hit one another with a belt. At each blow we say:

'It doesn't hurt.'

We hit harder, harder and harder.

We put our hands over a flame. We cut our thighs, our arms, our chests with a knife and pour alcohol on our wounds. Each time we say:

'It doesn't hurt.'

After a while, we really don't feel anything anymore. It's someone else who gets hurt, someone else who gets burned, who gets cut, who feels pain.

We don't cry anymore (Kristof, 1997, p. 16,17).

The twins experiment with different materialities and various corporeal encounters: with the flame that burns their flesh, with the metal blade that cuts, with the alcohol that stings. But rather than searching for acknowledgement or acceptance from others, or to be victims of their pain, they seek to get to know and to overcome pain, to become insensate. The mode of encounter that Kristof sketches in the twins' exercises is not a pursuit of positive or joyful affects, nor is it an escape from the negative or destructive ones. Instead, they seek encounters with materialities that would injure their bodies only as a means to desensitization and detachment. In a similar manner, in 'Exercise to Toughen the Mind', they work to inure themselves against the power of words to inflict psychological damage.

Grandmother says: 'Sons of a bitch!'

People say to us:

'Sons of a Witch! Sons of a whore!'

Others say:

'Idiots! Hooligans! Filthy kids! Asses! Dirty pups! Pigs!

Little devils! Bastards! Little squirts! Gallow birds!'

When we hear these words, our faces get red, our ears buzz, our eyes hurt, our knees tremble.

We don't want to blush or tremble any more, we want to get used to abuse, to hurtful words (Kristof, 1997, p. 20).

The twins then begin to insult one another, for about half an hour a day, until the words themselves are rendered meaningless and lose their ability to harm. 'We go on like this until the words no longer reach our brains, no longer reach even our ears' (Kristof, 1997, p. 20). Desensitization itself is in-corporated and physicalized within the pain of the body and the mind, and it is achieved through repetition of the same words and exercises. In a similar way, the twins work at anesthetizing themselves from the memory of their mother's terms of affection by embodying the emotions in the

reiteration of the phrases: ‘My darlings! My loves! ... By repeating them, we make these words gradually lose their meaning and the pain they carry in them is reduced’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 21). In repetition, affects are first captured and defined, then affirmed and reaffirmed in a rhythmical reiteration that acts as a process of embodiment. In this way, the purpose of repetition is similar to Beckett’s, such that it serves as a centralizing force, delivering to the twins a sense of stability, while also acting as a tool for desensitization. Training themselves not to see what is before them or hear what is around them, ‘we no longer need a shawl over our eyes or grass in our ears. The one playing the blind man simply turns his gaze inwards and the deaf one shuts his ears to all sounds’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 36). Like Beckett’s desensitized characters, Kristof’s twins become both insensate and anti-sentimental. With the continuous reiteration, they reach a state where sensations do not affect them, as repetition offers them an anchor to persevere in their pursuit of survival, and in enduring the present.

In another manifestation of repetition, the twins use the notebook as their exercise book for practices of self-writing, and as an educational instrument for self-discipline. Using the Bible merely for dictation and memorization, they are not interested in its meaning or spiritual content, but only in the form of words. They ostensibly self-write the chapters of the novel in their ‘Big Notebook’ which bear the same titles; they write and rewrite until they are satisfied with each section. To be contended, they feel they must shear away from their language all affective judgments, opinions, and sentiments, and seek a definite, factual expression:

We would write: ‘We eat a lot of walnuts’ and not: ‘we love walnuts’, because the word ‘love’ is not a definite word, it lacks precision and objectivity. ‘To love walnuts’ and ‘to love Mother’ don’t mean the same thing. The first expression designates a pleasant taste in the mouth, the second a feeling. Words that define feelings are very vague; it is better to avoid using them and to stick to the description of objects, human beings, and oneself; that is to say, to the faithful description of facts (Kristof, 1997, p. 27).

While I will return to the question of how the twins’ self-writing practices seek to desensitize language itself later, for now it is important to register how writing works as one in the series of repetitive types of exercises to which they subject themselves. These repetitive exercises serve to separate the twins from affective attachments in order to live free from the horrors that they witness, the feelings they might feel, or the pain – or indeed satisfactions – they might experience. The ascetic of expression is redoubled in

Kristof's style of writing and is itself another performance of the exercises that the twins practice in their daily activities.

In 'Exercise in Fasting' they refuse a freshly cooked chicken despite their intense hunger; later when they cook a chicken that they have slaughtered (a chicken that is killed in an 'Exercise in Cruelty', which extends to torturing a cat and drowning caught mice in boiling water) they resist any enjoyment they might get from eating it. Likewise, in 'Exercise in Begging', their intention is not to seek any actual desired object, but to learn to resist feelings of charity or pity. Rather, they undertake an exercise in desensitizing themselves to the shame of begging, to strip the act of begging to the mere physical ritual of it, and therefore to learn how people react to their begging, 'what effect it has' (Kristof, 1997, p. 32). When a passing woman offers them to work for her in exchange for food, they reply: 'We don't want to work for you, madam. We don't want to eat your soup or bread. We aren't hungry' (Kristof, 1997, p. 32). They beg in order to learn the act of begging itself, and how to understand the symbolic exchanges and power dynamics of charity, both of which they ultimately refuse. 'On our way home, we throw away the apples, biscuits and coins in the tall grass at the roadside. It is impossible to throw away the stroking on our hair' (Kristof, 1997, p. 32). In this way, repetitive exercises diagnose the processes that enable the twins to desensitize, they embed them in this process, and allow them to both surrender and control their present.

Yet there is another ethical component to these repetitive practices. In breaking with the systems of ethical exchange, whether in terms of how meaning and language can affect another person, or in the dynamics of the gift of charity, and reducing both to repetitive exercises, Kristof eschews any ethics of alterity based on mutual recognition and intersubjectivity. As in Žižek's terms, they resist the disgusting proximity of the other; the twins, as a 'double subject', in their encounters with often abusive adults, aim to forgo intersubjective exchange, and focus only on the materialities of survival. They nonetheless practice corporal works of mercy: they blackmail the parish priest who had sexually abused their neighbour Harelip into providing money for her and mentally ill mother; they whip the officer until he bleeds at his own masochistic request; they offer their bodies as sexual objects to exploitative adults, like the housekeeper who washes them, fellates them, and has them (in a perverse reprise of motherhood) suck at her erect nipples while she masturbates. But their withholding of intersubjective relation in the

name of bare survival often puts them in the position of dispassionate spectators, to death and dismemberment, or to similar scenes of sheer lust and carnal concupiscence: they witness the liaisons between two male officers, between the batman and the housekeeper, and their cousin by her boyfriend, and an act of bestiality between Harelip and a dog. These scenes are observed matter-of-factly, and are described in an often mechanical, animalistic, or pared-down prose: ‘The housekeeper prefers the batman to lie on his back. She then sits on the batman’s belly and moves up and down, as if she was riding a horse’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 79).

The series of repetitive exercises which shape the first chapters of *The Notebook* initially remind us of the Stoic ascetic practices of self-improvement. For Kristof’s twins, like the Stoics, endurance is predicated on self-mastery, a practice of training one’s body as well as the mind, with the goal of cultivating one’s strengths and escaping weaknesses. As a way of life, this philosophy is practical and functional; it prescribes self-improvement in all areas of the person’s development, but also advises an attitude of non-attachment to the material conditions of one’s being. On a personal as well as the community level, the Stoics advocate the practice of *sophrosyne* (translated as restraint or excellence of character) as a form of self-control, which leads to temperance and prudence, and supports one in the advancement of a sharp mind and a virtuous character. As Foucault writes in *The Use of Pleasure*, ‘in classical Greek thought, the ‘ascetics’ that enabled one to make oneself into an ethical subject was an integral part – down to its very form – of the practice of a virtuous life, which was also the life of a ‘free’ man in the full, positive political sense of the world’ (Foucault, 1990, p. 77). Or, similarly, in *The Care of the Self*: ‘The task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is capable of doing—central to the formation of the ethical subject’ (Foucault, 1990, p. 68). In this way, practices of the care of the self are realised through a series of repeated exercises that are tantamount to an ethical pedagogy, or a series of exercises in self-mastery. One’s ‘[r]elationship to the self appears as the objective of the practices of the self. This objective is the final aim of life, but at the same time a rare form of existence’ (Foucault, 2004, p. 127).³⁶ ‘No

³⁶ In both the later *Lectures at the College de France*, Foucault develops how self-mastery is not only directly linked to self-care, but is inextricable from the governance of others and *parrhesia* as the plain speaking (of the truth).

technique, no professional skill can be acquired without exercise; nor can the art of living, the *tekhnē tou biou*, be learned without an *askēsis* that should be understood as training of the self by oneself' (Foucault, 1997, p. 208). Within the practices of the self, self-care and writing are central, and the notebook serves as a toolkit for self-mastery: the notebook is the site of self-writing, it serves as a guide for conduct, as an aid in containing one's impulses, and as a document of the practical, repetitive exercises toward increased self-advancement. A notebook³⁷ is used as a material record as well as the framework for these exercises, but also as a collection of thoughts, ideas, or plans. For the Stoics, Foucault writes, a notebook does not serve as an intimate journal or a memory cabinet, but rather 'for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self' (Foucault, 1997, p. 211), but for the twins, it is a means towards a better self, as well as a final product of their self-development and desensitization. And in the end (as Kristof reveals in *The Proof* and *The Third Lie*), their notebook also provides a passageway to self-erasure and disappearance.

With their repetitive incessant exercises, the twins become masters of self-control and self-improvement. For them, the correlation between training their bodies and their minds is unequivocal, mastering one without the other is unattainable, and the repetition of practices acts as a stabilising force. Their notebook is the means through which their training comes about, and their practices of self-betterment, while retaining the form and techniques of *askesis* and self-mastery, break with the teleological structure. But the modes of *askesis* the twins undertake are neither of the cultivation of the self, or of the *eudaimonic* unfolding into a mutual well-being. As they embark on their exercise program in the time of war, abandonment and violence, all endeavours towards self-mastery become repetitive practices in desensitization and ultimately endurance. 'After a while, in fact, we no longer feel anything anymore' (Kristof, 1997, p. 16, 17). Virtue, it seems, is a luxury they cannot afford, and in the end, what appears to be a lack of telos emerges as one nevertheless: an unyielding quest for survival, and an endurance in everything that it requires.

2. *Withholding Assent and Anethics.*

³⁷ *Hypomnema* or *hupomnema* in Greek refers to a notebook, a reminder, or a draft.

Thus, for the twins, the training leading to mastery finds one of its purposes in itself, but it also has other objectives: desensitization ('after a while, we really don't feel anything anymore' (Kristof, 1997, p. 17)); emotional detachment ('by force of repetition, these words gradually lose their meaning, and the pain they carry is assuaged' (Kristof, 1997, p. 21)); and ultimately personal displacement ('it's someone else who gets hurt, someone else who gets burned, who gets cuts, who feels pain' (Kristof, 1997, p. 17)). They not only remove themselves from the dialectic of mutual recognition, but eventually abandon all attachment to the type of subjectivity which is tied to their personal identity. Detachment, for the twins, is first a detachment from oneself, then from others. Although this pertains to the Stoic *apatheia* as a state of freedom from passions and emotions, it also includes the twins' rational process of disengaging. The twins are exemplary in their training of their bodies and minds (unlike the broken adults which surround them) as they relentlessly pursue a state without any irrational impulses. Their exercises are designed to bring them back into their bodies, then to train their bodies not to feel pain and suffering: to discipline themselves to be unbreakable, undeterred, indomitable. Throughout these processes, the repetitive nature of their practices maintains a centralising function, and acts as a stabilizing force in the twins' pursuit of survival.

With the intention of self-mastery, and while remaining disengaged, the twins' sets of repetitive exercises thus become central to their endurance. This is evident in the scene with the foreign officer living in grandmother's house who instigates a relationship marred by sexual exploitation and abuse. His batman, clearly sensing the violation that would ensue, tries to warn the boys, but to no avail, as they freely offer their bodies to be violated.

The batman translates again:

'The officer say you two do many exercises. Also other kinds. He has seen you hit each other with belt.'

'That was our toughening up exercise.'

'The officer ask why you do all that?'

'To get used to pain.'

'He ask you have pleasure in pain?'

'No. We only want to overcome pain, heat, cold, hunger, whatever causes pain.'

'The officer admiration for you [sic]. He find you extraordinary' (Kristof, 1997, p. 81).

Here, the repetitive practices are again employed as means to desensitization from pain and disengagement from their own self, as well as from others. When the batman, aware of his superior's motives, concludes the translation and urges them to leave, the twins stay, wrapping their arms around the officer's neck as they press their bodies against his, as if leaning deeper into the suffering.

He rocks us to and fro.

Beneath us, between the officer's legs, we feel a warm movement. We look at one another, then we look the officer in the eyes. He gently pushes us away, he ruffles our hair, he stands up. He hands us two whips and lies face down on his belly. He says only one word, which, without knowing his language, we understand.

We hit (Kristof, 1997, p. 81, 82).

Remaining fully present in their own pain, they whip him, unrelentingly, until the officer's entire body is bloodied. But for the twins there is no sadomasochistic pleasure to be derived from this act; with no erotic implications, they do this dispassionately, such that any charity or satisfaction in the act is withheld. In dwelling in their suffering, and while causing pain to the officer, their aim is a hardened physicality and a callous, strong mind, immune to all adversity, and ultimately a completed process of desensitization, detachment, and displacement. Acting as tools in achieving this, the ascetic exercises, borrowed from the Stoics, are practiced and repeated until they are fully mastered.

3. *From Withholding Assent to Detached Attachment. The Instincts of Life and Death.*

They were brought to their grandmother to escape danger in the big city and spend the time of war in relative safety, yet the twins are thrust into an emotionally unsafe, unstable, and uncaring environment in which they are deprived of nurture. The cruel and inhospitable grandmother (who was supposed to be their protector) exposes them to more intimate horrors. Therefore, for the twins, the notebook becomes not only a manual for self-mastery, but also a place of refuge, an escape from the dreaded everyday life and the hopelessness that enshrouds them. The emptiness of the pages operates as the incorporeal, offering the twins an empty space to assemble and reinvent themselves, and a means of creating and practicing their own ethics of endurance.

Writing the notebook, thus, becomes a process of the production of the self through the

configuration of a new modality of ethics, an anethics of endurance which privileges corporeal forces, and which is predicated on the physical strength to withhold assent, yet to nevertheless continue. The blankness of the pages serves as the incorporeal condition of the twins' (self-)creation, the empty space for their transformation, a silence, ready to receive a voice and articulate utterance in a material form, a written record of their becoming.

On another level, the desensitization that the twins attain during this process creates an ontological shift: the focus is transferred from the goal to the act itself, from moral rules as guides to the act of changing and creating, and of withdrawing from structured moral systems, in pursuance of survival.

'So you know the Ten Commandments? Do you obey them?'

'No, sir, we do not obey them. Nobody obeys them. It is written, 'Thou shall not kill', and everybody kills.'

The priest says:

'Alas... it's the war' (Kristof, 1997, p. 83).

Setting her novel during the war allows Kristof to outline a breakdown of all ethics and morals, a collapse of human decency and virtue. Yet for the twins, the war is not the cause for their suspension of ethics. It merely exacerbates the hardship they have endured beginning with their early-childhood abandonment, it magnifies the deterioration of trustworthiness of the adults around them, and ultimately advances their renunciation of morals. Instead of practicing an ethics oriented toward a final telos of virtue or guided by duty, the twins' foundation of action becomes an endgame in which all that can be possessed is that which they withhold in the process. This is again performed through the embodied engagements with others, with their survival affirmed in the vulnerability of interacting, touching bodies. This openness facilitates an empathy for those inflicting pain onto themselves or others; the physical pain itself acts as an incorporated act. Yet these exchanges are not materialized through mutual appropriation; as the twins consistently demonstrate, no other is ontologically needed, since the aim is not an inter-subjective recognition. While remaining on the level of bodies, forces, and other energies, this ethics avoids the dialectic of one validating the other, and instead centres on the collaborative acts that lead to intersections with others.

Thus, in avoiding the dialectics of mutual recognition, the twins learn to react to outside stimulus without reciprocity, in a manner where their non-reaction is a form of a

non-response. This type of withholding is a constantly recurring theme in the novel. If *apatheia* in Stoicism refers to a state of imperturbability regarding one's emotions, withholding is a process which involves action and requires engagement; this leads back to corporeality as consisting in activity, and it reveals itself in acts. When, along with their exercises, the twins devise a set of 'rules' in which their only imperative is to deliberately emotionally disengage, they are engaging in an act, or a process of withholding. Determined to remain unaffected by other people or the world outside, to achieve a body that endures pain, starvation, and physical abuse, as well as a mind that is astute, yet insensate, they operate in this scope of withholding. Here, in fact, they are not withholding anything, and not withholding something, but are rather opening an interval of withholding, a space to withhold, which is again performed through Kristof's restrained writing style. Put differently, if for Foucault the care of the self leads to a Stoic ethical stance that opens itself to a set of practices or counter-conducts, in Kristof's novel, the twins' sheer physicality of the act withholds ethics to the point at which it becomes an anethics.

Although they open themselves to radical vulnerability and pain, the conditions of this openness are established by the twins, and they refuse to accede to any determinate form of victimhood. Rather, their exercises are constructed with the aim of a disengagement from other people and from the external circumstances, as this enables them to eschew mutual recognition on the ontological, as well as on the inter-relational level. They achieve this not by rejection, not by repudiation, but rather by an intentional choice of remaining outside of this type of human exchange. The twins stay withdrawn, unaffected by external circumstances, and they seek no validation from others. They do not thank and do not wish to forgive. When they are maintaining their rigorous mind and body-training programme, they are not pursuing their own *Bildung* as a process of becoming ethical subjects. Their self-discipline is not an education oriented towards a unified self, or towards a transformation of their identity for the benefit of the broader society.³⁸ In its charting of material encounters without ethical ends, *The Notebook* might rather be considered as an anti-bildungsroman since it does not detail a life-long process of the twins' self-cultivation, with virtue carrying as much value as truth.

³⁸ As defined within the tradition of German Idealism, *Bildung* is comparable to the Stoic and Spinoza's practices of self-advancement. Hegel, von Humboldt, Herder, Goethe, and Shiller wrote extensively on the concept of *Bildung* as not only mastering one's intellectual skills, but also shaping one's humanity within the society.

Therefore, when it comes to their exercises, the question returns, what are they for? For Kristof's twins, the goal to which all the strenuous mental and physical exercises lead is survival, and it is accompanied by a detached, desensitised, disengaged, isolated existence. Rejecting the dynamic which is dependent on mutual recognition includes, for the twins, a detachment from society and a complete withdrawal from participation in a dialectic of alterity. As the twins disengage from the face-to-face encounters with other people, they start investigating the material forces that shape new types of subjectivities and new possibilities for self-erasure, and ultimately of endurance.

Without a final goal, what remains is the process of perseverance in itself; there is no good or evil, only survival; there is no dependence on an other, only multiplicities of bodies, forces, energies and acts. Yet as capacities for embodied engagements, they all engage in a dialectic of affecting one another, strengthening, and weakening each other as independent *conatuses*, intertwined with one another in an exchange of a detached attachment. Within closeness, there is always distance, within vulnerability, strength. In this disconnected space, it is again the perseverance, predicated on the physical strength to withhold assent which enables them to continue. Eventually, the twins refine their ascetic exercises to become masters of desensitization from stimuli and of detachment from others, and ultimately, this facilitates a final disengagement from themselves.

A more detailed look at the twins' detachment reveals its close link to the Stoic term of withholding assent, and the relationship between these two terms as one of the foundational cornerstones of this dissertation. Primarily, the Stoics suggest that we withhold our assent to the emotions and instead prioritize the rule of reason; as I explore across the dissertation, Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee dramatize this notion in their own specific manner. One of the main characteristics that connects the three writers is their focus on the process of withholding, rather than on the object that is withheld, or on the pre-established subject performing the process. With Kristof's twins, the scope is extensive and multifaceted; it applies to feelings³⁹, from which they try to numb and disassociate, but it also refers to the community and the dialectic of mutual recognition as such, as well as to all relationships of mastery. Furthermore, it pertains to ethics and morals, as the twins disengage from formal imperatives, defined rules, and prescriptive

³⁹ The twins use the term 'feelings' exclusively, which also seems to apply to emotions or what Spinoza names affects.

behaviours; withholding assent as an act enables the twins to completely withdraw from the dynamics of reciprocal relationships on the personal level, as well as within the community.

Hence, withholding assent is, in a way, a deliberate, rational decision, but in the case of the twins, it is also an inevitable and necessary choice. With their father at war and their mother forced to leave them with the grandmother, far away from home and their community, the twins' experience of abandonment and isolation is shared with other children of war. Therefore, what appears to be an unethical and emotionless shift to a cold and pragmatic mindset, could be interpreted as the twins finding power in their destructive encounters; they are compelled to find their strength in negative acts, again, not by intentional and rational choice, but by necessity. The predicament of their lives disables them from the capacity of electing the positive affects, instead, it preconditions and necessitates them to withholding assent to all affects, and in a detachment that prioritizes bare survival.

It's Sunday. We catch a chicken and cut its throat as we have seen grandmother do. We bring the chicken into the kitchen and say:
 'You must cook it, grandmother.'
 'When she has calmed down a bit, we say to her again:
 'When there is something to be killed, you must fetch us. We'll do it.'
 She says:
 'You like it, eh?'
 'No, grandmother, it's precisely because we don't like it. It's for that reason that we must get used to it' (Kristof, 1997, p. 44-45).

This un-affectedness might resemble a state of apathy – of getting 'used to it' – yet it is rather another mode of withholding assent, in this case, to all affects that might cause a change. Avoiding positive as well as negative affects enables the twins to remain outside of all external influences, and it allows them to demonstrate random acts of benevolence as well as cruelty. Thus, within anethics of survival, the war's atrocities are arbitrary and void of any meaning, telos, or purpose. 'But sometimes a bomb falls on a house anyway. In which case we locate the spot by the direction of the smoke and go see what has been destroyed. If there is anything left to take, we take it' (Kristof, 1997, p. 103). The necessity of their life-saving detachment from the agony of war dislocates the foundations of all ethics, it discards the regulatory prescriptions for how to live a virtuous life; instead, it institutes bare life itself as a practice. This means that the twins persevere in their desire for life and their anethics of survival often on the edge of death,

such that violence, self-harm, and a desire to die exist as conterminous with life. The *conatus* as an enduring, indestructible force of life remains undeterred by external destructive forces and failed encounters. And while it persists in its independence from the disempowering relations, I believe the twins' anethics of endurance also dwells in the space of Freud's battle of the two drives, the death drive against the life affirming 'preserver of all things'.

Thus, the twins' exercises and practices continue in pursuance of their detached, anethical modality, and indeed, they intensify as the novel progresses and the horrors of war worsen. Yet again, Kristof mirrors the dispassionate immensity of the narrative with the materialised form of her writing, and the human brutality becomes almost too much to bear. This is depicted in a scene from the time immediately after the country is liberated, when new foreigners arrive and take over. The twins' homeland goes from the hands of one occupier to another, and the transfer is merciless and violent. During their aggressive invasion, the twins' neighbour Harelip is raped and killed. Her mother, who they presumed had been mute, deaf, and blind, speaks to the twins in suicidal despair and asks them to set her house on fire. They oblige in a way that is both a corporal work of mercy and yet unspeakably cruel:

We ask:

'Do you really want to die?'

'What else could I want? If you want to do something for me, set light to the house. I don't want them to find us like this.'

We say:

'But it will hurt terribly.'

'Don't bother yourselves about that. Set light to the house, that's all, if you're capable of it.'

'Yes, madam, we are capable of it. You can depend on us.'

We slit her throat with the razor, then we go and siphon off petrol from an army vehicle. We pour the petrol over both bodies and over the walls of the house. We set light to it and go home (Kristof, 1997, p. 139).

Persistence as bare life, for the twins, necessitates a competence in implacable inhumanness. In performing these acts, and by practicing withholding assent, the twins seek to remain unscathed by the horrors of war and the senseless killing around them. Other times, they engage pain and death unemotionally as a material encounter emptied of sentimentality, even when they are the ones inflicting the pain and causing death. This is the example above with the neighbour, but also after the war ends when the twins' father arrives and asks for his wife. The grandmother tells him that she had died,

together with her baby. As he desperately wants to see her dead body, he digs up the flowerbed that was planted on her grave, but upon finding the remains leaves, shocked and horrified. The twins, again unemotionally, fill in the grave with soil, but not before removing both skeletal remains, which they afterward clean and store in the attic.

‘Later, for months, we smooth and polish Mother’s skull and bones and those of the baby, then we carefully reconstitute the skeleton by attaching each bone to thin pieces of wire. When we have finished our work, we hang Mother’s skeleton from one of the attic’s beams and hang the baby’s skeleton around her neck’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 156).

Harboured within these acts are vulnerability, warmth and tenderness towards their mother, the last person that gave the same to them. In this way, the deaths of the mother and the baby sister signal the definitive dissolution of an emotionally attached life, and of a subjectivity dependent on others. But it also fully illuminates the materiality of survival, with the skeletons, these corporeal remnants of their mother’s and sister’s lives, as physical bonds between life and death, and smoothing and polishing as acts of material encounters.

In a final performative act of detachment, *The Notebook* ends with one of the twins crossing the border and leaving the other behind. For the first time in their lives, the twins symbolically and literally separate, and in the process sacrifice their own father. This enables one of them to cross safely to the other side of the border and start a new life in a different country, and away from the other twin:

‘Go on, Father. We have twenty minutes before the next patrol arrives.’
 Father puts the two planks under his arm and moves forward. He places one of the planks against the fence and climbs up. We lie face downwards behind the big tree, with our hands over our ears and our mouths open. There is an explosion. We run to the barbed wire with two other planks and the sack.
 Father is lying near the second fence. Yes, there is a way of crossing the frontier: it’s to get someone else to go first. Picking up the sack, walking in Father’s footprints, then over his inert body, one of us goes into the other country. The other one goes back to Grandmother’s house (Kristof, 1997, p. 162).

The separation, the escape, and later the disappearance, the self-erasure and reinvention are all conditioned by these steps that lead over the father’s body. As his footprints become the twins’ stepping stones to the passage into individuation, his death enables a new space, one which is both on this side as well as the other, which is connected in its separation, held as independent in its difference. The anethics of endurance with its practice of withholding assent thus culminates in a

detached attachment in which the disjointedness folds itself into a consonance. Rather than a thesis and antithesis coming together in a synthesis by overcoming, then integrating their differences, the process of detached attachment reconciles two different materialities in a state of suspension. In this way, survival, separation, and death become a method for living.

4. *Endurance and Event.*

In reading *The Notebook*, I have suggested a parallel between the form of Stoic ethics, as reprised by Foucault, and the twins' own set of ascetic exercises. Yet, as we have seen, their practices as a form of the care of the self are at odds with the Stoic ethics of truth oriented toward virtue and self-improvement, as well as any other deontology. Deleuze, in a different way, provides a contrasting picture of Stoic ethics that can nonetheless inform my analysis of Kristof. In Deleuze's Stoic ethics, developed primarily in his *Logic of Sense* (2013), the focus moves from a teleological ethics to one which centres on the event. Deleuze's reading of Stoic ethics, in line with his broader creative ontology, introduces an ethics oriented toward becoming, articulated as the event to come. Deleuze writes, 'Stoic ethics is concerned with the event; it consists of willing (*vouloir*) the event as such, that is, of willing that which occurs (*vouloir ce qui arrive*) insofar as it does occur' (1990, p. 143). This ethics, in its inverse temporality, can be encapsulated in the formula of Joë Bosquet (which Deleuze is fond of paraphrasing): 'my wound existed before me; I was born to embody it.' For Kristof's twins, the trauma of war, the separation and isolation inflict a wound that they do not attempt to heal, but rather learn to not feel. For them, the site of ethics (or anethics) becomes the body, and more specifically, the surface of the body, and the ethical encounters materialize in these surfaces, while coming in contact with one another. In *Logic of Sense* (1990), Deleuze again reminds us that this type of exchange does not concern itself with the depth of otherness, with recognising or appropriating another, but rather with the active touching of the surface; (an)ethics unfolds from these acts and energies interacting with one another. Therefore, when the twins reject the charity of others, they throw away the food, they refuse to embody the surface contact, so they withhold their assent. And in this way, the exercise in begging becomes an example of anethics of corporeal encounters with surface as the place of contact, driven by survival.

Bodies touch, but they do not appropriate one another, and the twins demonstrate this when they vehemently reject all charity. By wanting to throw away the stroking of their hair, they want to assure that their bodies will not become sites of dehumanisation; and they want to prevent this by training their minds and bodies to be strong and resilient, eventually achieving desensitization.

I will come back to the twins shortly, but first I will consider the tension that arises between a Foucauldian ethics of self-training and a Deleuzian ethics of event. For Deleuze, ethics (or ethical life) is an affirmation of the event to come, a becoming-worthy of one's impersonal fate. We can find inflected in Deleuze's Stoic ethics both a Spinozistic understanding of joyful and sad affects, as well as a love of fate verging on Nietzsche's *amor fati*. Rosi Braidotti, in her essay '*Nomadic Ethics*'⁴⁰, scopes out an ethics of endurance built from sustaining our joyful encounters, an ethics as a 'discourse about forces, desires and values that act as empowering modes of becoming' (Braidotti, 2012 a, p. 343). Her version of Deleuze-inflected ethics differs from Foucault's 'ethics as praxis' insofar as it eschews a notion of the ethical subject as a function of ethics and cognition: knowledge of the limits of the self. 'We have to be worthy of what happens to us and rework it within an ethics of relation, without falling into negativity. Of course, repugnant and unbearable events do happen. Ethics consists, however, in reworking these events in the direction of positive relations' (Braidotti, 2012 b, p. 185). Here, Braidotti is following Deleuze's active acceptance of the event, of that which occurs, and a Nietzschean cooperation with the fate that befalls us. She is also incorporating Spinoza's insistence on seeking, integrating, and embodying joyful or positive affects as a part of a deliberate, involved, active process of becoming.

Yet although Deleuze refers to his ethics as Stoic, when it comes to accepting the fate that befalls us, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus take a different path. For Deleuze, the event is always 'already in the process of being produced' (1990, p. 166), and what we will is what was to materialize anyway, as Nietzsche proposes with *amor fati*, a fate that we embody. What is crucial here is the active cooperation; not resistance, refusal, rejection of the event which would lead to *ressentiment*, but rather 'to affirm that which comes to pass, to will it as if it were what we would have chosen for ourselves' (Sellars, 2006, p. 161). Therefore, for the Stoics⁴¹, fate is something that

⁴⁰ Rosi Braidotti, '*Nomadic Ethics*', *Deleuze Studies* 7 (3), pp. 342-359.

⁴¹ Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Epictetus all write about this.

happens to us, but our role in this is one of acceptance in the sense of recognition and compliance, not active willing. Thus, the Stoics resign themselves to what their fate brings, but they do not actively affirm it as does Deleuze via Nietzsche and Bousquet. And as much as they otherwise seek joyful affects, Epictetus advises: ‘do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen’ (Epictetus, 1983, p. 13). The difference here is decisive, as Deleuze’s understanding initiates the individual in the process ontology, such that ‘an individual conceived as a process will be constituted by a series of events, and each new event – no matter what its content – will become a necessary part of who he is’ (Sellars, 2006, p. 166). Differently, and crucially, the Stoics exclude themselves from the process and view events as external factors that happen to befall them, while they remain as parts of Nature, with fate acting as a vital component as well.

These two renditions of the Stoic ethics, in combination with Spinoza’s ethics of the *conatus* and of joyful affirmation, are informative for how we might read the ethical potency of Kristof’s novel. Although she dramatizes the twins’ exercises in a way reminiscent of a Stoic ethics of constancy, it is not the case that the twins patiently endure the events that befall them. As they eschew virtuous goals as well as relations of reciprocity, the twins’ actions are emphatically shorn of the telos of *eudaimonia*. Kristof’s twins, unlike Bosquet, were not born to embody their wounds, but rather were born (or, more specifically trained) not to feel, or to render themselves, through their series of exercises and via withholding assent, insensate. They are in a situation in which any choice between joy and *ressentiment* is rendered impossible; by withholding assent, they step away altogether and prefer not to choose. They neither seek any worthiness toward the event or resignation before it. An anethics of endurance, thus, following the twins, should be examined at the perimeter of bare survival, beyond good and evil, outside of ethical laws or imperatives. Survival and self-preservation, a desensitised state of detachment, the prevalence of sheer physicality, reflected in their restraint and *askesis*, and in the capacity for embodied engagements, are the foundations of *The Notebook*’s philosophy. The twins borrow from the Stoics the practices of self-improvement that Foucault determines are linked to self-care but remove the goal of self-betterment; they also obtain the focus on the process and the act from what Deleuze would call the ethics of becoming. For Deleuze, ethics relates to the forces and acts that operate as modes of becoming, and the twins remain firmly anchored in the process

itself. Rosi Braidotti calls this ‘an ontology of process, that is, ontological relationality’ (Braidotti, 2013, p. 343) again without the search for affirmation or joyous affects, outside of a practice of *Bildung*, but rather with the emphasis on the act of endurance as a movement. Thus, the twins do not subscribe to Deleuze’s version of the Stoic ethics where under the guidance of *amor fati* they will the event and actively accept, even affirm what happens. And they are not born to embody the wound that existed before them; instead, the twins construct their ethics after the wound is inflicted, by responding to the pain brought upon them with a carefully designed, physicalized program of strengthening, detachment, and desensitization. ‘Stop shouting, grandmother, hit us instead’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 17). Despite craving corporeal collaborative acts, they do not see themselves as a part of ‘Nature’ (or of a community) or resign themselves to what befalls them. Their path of intense training instead works to achieve a desensitized state of detachment through a conscious, intentional withholding assent to any dependence on others, to prescriptive morals, ethical rules, and imperatives. It allows them to remain on the scaffolding without ever scaling the building, firmly preserving their independence and autonomy, hovering in the state of detached attachment, persisting.

5. *Mastery and Trauma: ‘The Human Herd’.*

As the twins forsake inscribing their singular acts within ethical imperatives or affective attachments, they are seemingly confined within the self-created limits of their physical exile and emotional withdrawal and seek instead to remain on the periphery of the community. To be sure, they do often reach out to others with acts of generosity and benevolence, and these acts might be perceived as acts of attachment. However, any putatively benevolent acts are very quickly followed with antithetical acts of cruelty or coldness. While they seek to understand charity, they work hard to withdraw from its condescending power dynamics. As we have seen, in ‘Exercise in Begging’, the twins describe how a day on the street begging for food and money is de facto only an experiment in the act of begging itself to learn—and to renounce—the reactions and emotions of those who offer them charity. ‘She asks: ‘Why are you begging then?’ ‘To find out what effect it has and to observe people’s reactions’’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 32). Complicating any ethics of mere survival, they beg because they are *not* hungry for

food. The exercise in begging, as such, is not set up to obtain any thing, but operates as a practice of the act itself. The twins are experimenting with the limits of lack and estrangement, as well as with the relationships of presence, distance, and detachment. Upon their return home, they can throw away the objects of charity they received, but they struggle to cast off the residue of the human gestures and contact that come with these objects. They can return the things they have received but they cannot erase the touches which remain on the surface of their skin or hair. It is as if the twins want to explore in the exercise in begging how the corporeality of acts of charity can write on their bodies, while rejecting charity's metaphysics, its system of alterity and recognition, its power dynamics, and its residue of condescending benevolence. But even as they attempt to do so, they are troubled by their inability to eliminate all the traces of others left on the surface of their bodies. In these touches remain the residues of mastery which must be resisted.

The twins' practices of self-mastery, then, collide with the manifold ways others – the grandmother, the batman, the housekeeper, etc. – seek to gain mastery over them. Julietta Singh, in *Unthinking Mastery* allows us to see the twins' exercises as a 'shift' in the politics of master 'from a focus on overcoming an opponent or adversary toward skilful management of the self and its others' (Singh, 2018, p. 11)⁴². By toughening their minds and their bodies, and by learning and renouncing the power game of charity (another mask of mastery), they do not seek to humanize themselves so much as disallow themselves to be dehumanized. For Singh, submission, dehumanization, and ongoing practices of subordination act as necessary prerequisites for humanitarian fetishism, the disastrous consequence whenever power over another is introduced into any relationship, including in acts of purported charity. The twins, in effect, seek to cut off the process of dehumanization at the level of the act and at the level of their bodies, or where their bodies come into contact with other bodies.

Despite the twins' exercises in desensitization and detachment aimed at preventing their own dehumanization, we find events of dehumanization throughout *The*

⁴² As Singh further explains: 'first, mastery involves splitting in either the sense of carving a boundary or an infliction of mutilation', which is closely followed by 'the subordination of what is on one side of the border to the power of what is on the other' (Singh, 2018, p. 12, 13).

Notebook. But no event in the novel is as harrowing as when the twins witness a train full of people being taken to a concentration camp:

Two or three hundred of them pass by, flanked by soldiers. A few women are carrying their young children on their backs, on their shoulders or are pressing them against their breasts. One of them falls; hands stretch out to catch the child and the mother; others carry them, because a soldier has already pointed a rifle at them.

Nobody speaks, nobody cries; their eyes are fixed on the ground. All one can hear is the sound of the soldiers' studded boots.

Just in front of us, a thin arm emerges from the crowd. A dirty hand is held out and a voice asks:

'Bread?'

The housekeeper smiles and pretends to offer the rest of her bread; she holds it closer to the outstretched hand, then, with a great laugh, brings the piece of bread back to her mouth, takes a bite and says:

'I'm hungry, too' (Kristof, 1997, p. 99).

Again, Kristof returns to touching, or failed touching: mothers carrying their children who are touching their breasts, this primary and purest source of nourishment and comfort, and with this, life; the rifle pointing but failing to touch; the boots touching the ground; and the ultimate aborted contact of the housekeeper with the prisoner's hand. The 'Human Herd' scene inverts 'Exercises in Begging': by attempting to reject the stroking of the hair and finding it disgusting, the twins prevent their bodies to become sites of dehumanization. Here, the opposite takes place; the housekeeper initially stretches out her hand as if offering the bread, only to then pull it back and terminate the exchange. Her voice: 'Bread?' initially acts as a gesture of charity, yet it is promptly withdrawn. This performance of cruelty cements the act of dehumanization, and firmly restates her position of mastery over the imprisoned Jewish people. Her dehumanization of the Jewish prisoners is a result of a severance of her own humanity from the people she is faced with; dwelling in a space of common humanity would prevent her from disengaging, so instead, she chooses an act of supremacy. In this frightening rendition of Hegel's master and slave dynamic, the scene brings together mastery and dehumanization in a way where the former is conditioned by the latter; domination is preceded by dehumanization, which is prefaced by a complete emotional dissolution. Further echoed in the scene with the withdrawn bread is the fact that the housekeeper used to feed the twins bread with butter after their Sunday bath, which ended with another striking example of abuse, performed across the surfaces of their bodies: 'She strokes and kisses us all over our bodies. With her tongue she tickles us on our necks,

under our arms, between our buttocks. She kneels down in front of the seat and sucks our cocks, which get bigger and harder in her mouth' (Kristof, 1997, p. 72). The casualness of her violation of the boys is mirrored in the nonchalance with which she denies the prisoner the bread that she initially offered, and the event with the human herd becomes a scene of inverse charity; the bread itself serves as a symptom of the novel's violent encounters.

Furthermore, and in a reprise of the twins' own desensitization, the Jewish prisoners in the carriages do not speak or express pain, their traumatic circumstances seemingly rather force them to disassociate and become insensate. Ultimately, after witnessing this distressing scene, the twins radically examine their own position of emotional detachment, as well as reassess the perimeters of anethics of survival as such. The housekeeper says to the twins: 'Off you go and don't worry! None of that has anything to do with you. It'll never happen to you. Those people are only animals' (Kristof, 1997, p. 100). But despite being given permission to detach, the cruel act of absolute dehumanization of the prisoners, for the twins, corroborates total human detachment; they recognize this, and they retaliate. Instead of withdrawing, they withstand. Planting a grenade into the oven of her kitchen, they severely injure the housekeeper and cause her a life-long impairment. They are imprisoned and interrogated, yet after the release, they reject the priest's offer to confess: 'We are sorry for nothing. We have nothing to be sorry about' (Kristof, 1997, p. 124). When the town people disassociate from the immense suffering of the Jewish prisoners that are passing through their streets, the twins, in a performance of paradoxically violent compassion, punish the housekeeper. In this instance, they forsake their self-imposed isolation from the community. Instead of remaining detached, they empathize, then engage and retaliate, as if the threat to survival of others returns them from chasing bare survival of their own. But they want to remain outside of the metaphysics of charity with its metaphorical work of mercy that is inscribed in the religious work that the housekeeper's employer, the priest practices. The twins planting the grenade for the housekeeper in the oven of the priest's kitchen (the same oven where she used to bake bread for them) serves as the extreme embodiment of their position regarding charity and mastery. It also highlights the close relationship between the twins' anethics of endurance and practices of violence as representations of different materialities of survival.

There is a clear association between the scene of the human herd with the theory of trauma in relation to repetition. Although there is not enough space to develop it more fully here, the traumatic dimension of anethics, hyperbolised in the cruelty toward the Jewish prisoners, forms the context out of which the twins' ethical stance of withholding assent and the position of detached attachment emerge. Repetition, in turn, acts as the connective tissue between these concepts. On one hand, the repetitive practices that the twins embark on in their systemic training result in the state of desensitization, which is a prerequisite for withholding assent and subsequently for a detached attachment; Kristof's use of a sparse, attenuated, desensitizing language could be said to work through a repetitive process of lessening. On the other hand, an uncontrolled, repetitive occurrence of various experiences linked to the original trauma is an intrusive, but archetypal phenomena in the event of trauma itself. Cathy Caruth examines this in her expansive work on trauma, and perhaps most convincingly in her canonical book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), as well as in the article 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History' where she writes: 'The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all' (Caruth, 1991, p. 187). Her interpretation is based on Freud's seminal work on trauma, where he first connects the concepts of repetition, trauma, and return.

With regards to the twins, I argue, the inter-relation between these concepts operates somewhat differently. For Freud and Caruth, the traumatic experience repeats itself in hallucinations and other repetitive phenomena that find their way into the survivor's existence long after the original trauma ended. But for the twins, repetition serves a different goal as it becomes an operative means to desensitization, with a calming and centralising function that enables the twins to repurpose the trauma, rather than recycle it. Determined to surmount the trauma, not surrender to the repetitive structure of its manifestation, they incorporate it into their training towards desensitization. Commencing with the traumatic experience of abandonment, neglect, and the atrocities of war, they integrate and embody the trauma into the practice of withholding assent, to ultimately achieve a state of a detached attachment. If for Freud and Caruth being traumatised means being possessed by the event of the original trauma, for the twins, the resolution exists in the assimilation of the traumatic event, and

its absolute reintegration. The inability to fully possess and then properly process the event is what keeps the traumatised in the suffering, but the twins' withholding assent operates as a categorical imperative to embody the wounds that exist before them, rather than to accede to the mastery of the dehumanizing forces that materialize. Nothing eludes it in its uncompromising refusal to submit to any form of mastery, or to succumb to any type of external power. Withholding assent, as an ethical maxim, cannot withstand the compulsion and the dynamics of trauma, therefore, the twins must aim to redeem and reconstruct it from the outset. The aim is to eschew repression or denial, abandonment, or disregard; rather, the twins reconstitute it as a *dunamis*, the potential energy from which withholding assent fuels the anethics of endurance. For the twins, the wound does not present a traumatic event that they were born to embody; rather, trauma acts as an impetus to a creation of their own mode of ethics, one which is constructed *after*, and as a response to trauma. Withholding assent aborts acceptance or resignation to the event, and instead brings forward the surface ethics of interacting bodies. These exchanges, for the twins, are neither empowering nor disempowering, as they withdraw from both, but they continue as incentives for the creation of their anethics of endurance.

6. *Writing as Self-creation, Self-disappearance, and Self-erasure.*

The practice of writing is one of the key themes of the novel. Initially conceived as an exercise in spelling, grammar and vocabulary, the notebook offers a form of advancement towards mastering the discipline via writing. As a method of journaling, it enables the withdrawal from the emotional charges that might interfere with the goal to detach. It performs as a means of self-creation, with the twins using writing as an exercise in self-mastery and self-improvement, while simultaneously chronicling their progress; they are creating both themselves as well as the account of their self-creation. But writing also serves as a form of self-disappearance or erasure, which is described in greater detail in the second and third novel of the trilogy (and which I will address later in this chapter). What is key, however, is how writing as process and metaphor makes available forms of subjectivity which are established through series of collaborative acts and based on a fortitude to withhold assent.

Kristof's tight and clean prose, structurally elemental and devoid of unnecessary adjectives and adverbs, itself serves as a performative refusal of sentimentality in the face of violence, trauma, and suffering. The twins use words in a manner similar to how they withstand the violent blows to their physical bodies; writing becomes a way of hardening themselves against the force of words to inflict pain. Again, as the twins note in the chapter 'Exercise to toughen the mind':

We sit down at the kitchen table opposite one another and, looking each other in the eyes, we say more and more terrible words. One of us says:
 'Shit! Arse-hole!'
 The other one says:
 'Bugger! Sod!'
 We go on like this until the words no longer reach our brains, no longer reach even our ears (Kristof, 1997, p. 20).

Words, therefore, rather than reinforcing meaning or affect, are repeated in a mechanical, detached manner, until they are rendered meaningless or desensitized. Repetition makes present, but also de-signifies the words, while the twins' focus on the mechanics of their rhythm carries them into an almost anesthetized state. Yet the twins are not emotionally and ethically paralyzed or apathetic. The practice of withholding assent is a deliberate ethical stand. Recalling the way their mother spoke to them, the twins practice repetition as a study in anti-sentimentality:

'My darlings! My loves! I love you... I shall never leave you... I shall never love anyone but you... Forever... You are all I have in life...'
 By repeating them we make these words gradually lose their meaning and the pain that they carry in them is reduced (Kristof, 1997, p. 21).

Aware of the significance and the potential implications of the emotions suggested by these expressions, they immunize themselves against them by purposefully interpreting them as meaningless. Furthermore, words become not only sense-less, the twins transform them into mere physical (auditory, visual) sensations. By repeating and embodying these words, they toughen their minds and bodies against the emotions that the expressions cause, as well as against the meaning itself. The twins know that despite the promises of love or togetherness, the harsh realities of war, of physical separation, and arbitrary encounters will only lead to pain and loss. Therefore, their practices and exercises are preparing

them, as Marcus Aurelius, suggested, ‘to be like the rock that the waves keep crashing over. It stands unmoved and the raging of the sea falls still around it’ (2002, p. 48). While withholding emotional investment, they eschew the possibility of sentimentality, even when hearing false ethical overtures of others.

Kristof thus sets up, across the novel, a persistent encounter between words and affects, in which words, through their repetition, work to drain away any emotional charge. Therefore, language and writing, especially writing in the notebook, become parts of a larger strategy, or more specifically, a set of exercises to toughen and make insensate the twins’ bodies and minds. But as I suggested before, the exercises in toughening the body and the mind do not lead to a higher purpose or telos. As much as the practice structurally resembles the form of Stoical care of the self, this is not a Stoic training in virtue, rather, the exercises stay focused on the materiality of encounter. ‘To decide whether it’s ‘Good’ or ‘Not good’, we have a very simple rule: the composition must be true. We must describe what is, what we hear, what we do’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 27). Kristof questions the very reliability of words to signify emotions, and the twins’ exercises verge on linguistic scepticism: ‘Words that define feelings are very vague; it is better to avoid using them and stick to the description of objects, human beings, and oneself; that is to say, to the faithful description of facts’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 27).

Love’s affective unreliability deprives its ability to be a precise designator, but this is, again, part of a larger strategy of desensitization. For the twins to make a statement, anything personal therefore must be abolished before the thinking process begins, and before it could find its way onto the page. Once the details have been chronicled, the events cease to hold any further meaning or power over them. This is the goal of their practices as they progress throughout the novel:

Others say:

‘Idiots! Hooligans! Filthy kids! Asses! Dirty pups! Pigs! Little devils! Bastards! Little squirts! Gallows birds!’

When we hear these words, our faces get red, our ears buzz, our eyes hurt, our knees tremble.

We don’t want to blush or tremble anymore, we want to get used to abuse, to hurtful words.

We sit down at the kitchen table face to face, and looking each other in the eye, we say more and more terrible words’ (Kristof, 1997, p. 20).

Following the decision to immunise themselves to such verbal assaults, they continue the exercises until the insulting and demeaning words are rendered void of meaning and

affect. In this way, writing becomes a process of erasing the significance of these words, such that writing becomes part of a larger programme of erasure or escape. The twins withhold assent to the system of how words provoke affective states in bodies and use words instead as a means to endure the events which befall them. Elsewhere, Kristof similarly uses writing as a mode of self-deletion, predicated on endurance. In *Yesterday*, she writes: ‘I had only one desire: to leave, to walk, to die, whatever. I wanted to get away, never come back, disappear, melt away into the forest, the clouds, no longer have memories, forget, forget’ (Kristof, 2019, p. 23). Yet not unlike to what we found in Beckett’s and Coetzee’s texts, Kristof finds writing to also be a mode of continuous perseverance; to write becomes a way of living on, even in the most severe circumstances of deprivation.

Thus, writing acts as one of the elements in the twins’ cultivation of emotional detachment as a deliberate, intentional process of withholding assent to external affects, not an *a priori* structure. Kristof offers another example of this when she describes, in the early pages of *The Notebook*, how the mother brings her twins to the countryside. The exchange with the grandmother is brief and cold, and there is a palpable emotional distance between the two women, serving as a signal to the boys that the environment is inhospitable. Since there is no hope of a positive change, the twins quickly re-evaluate and readjust, their ethical comportment to be acquired through laborious reiteration of the same unchanging exercises for the mind and the body: exposure to the stimulus, an annihilation of the physical and emotional reactivity, an intentionally chosen response of withholding assent that leads to an ethical position of detached attachment. This is again practiced in writing. During this process, it is within the minimal space between the exposure and the response that the reactivity is abolished, and the response is processed in a rational manner, following their self-written philosophical manifesto: to find strength in a mode of emotional detachment, to train the body to the limits of endurance, to use friction to find stability, weakness to fuel fortitude, and to convert darkness into enough light to sustain them.

7. *Post-Script on Self-Erasure.*

The 'Human Herd' chapter in *The Notebook* forces the twins to hyperbolise their ethical position in relation to others. Immediately, they are thrust into an investigation of their core beliefs and decisions, from withdrawing assent to the exercises aiming at desensitization, and ultimately of their anethics of survival. This leads them to physically separate at the end of *The Notebook*, but also to forsake each other and relinquish their practices in pursuit of mastery. Kristof thus continues with the second book of the trilogy, *The Proof* (*La preuve*, 1988) and later with the third, *The Third Lie* (*Le troisième mensonge*, 1991) based on a different premise. It is one that is not concerned primarily with *askēsis* as a requirement in the training of desensitization with the aim of survival, but still engages with many of the issues that *The Notebook* introduced, such as withholding assent, endurance and, most prominently, with writing as self-creation and self-erasure. After the final separation, 'one of us goes into the other country. The one who is left goes back to grandmother's house' (Kristof, 1997, p. 162). The second novel of the trilogy serves as an investigation of survival, but in this instance of staying and nonetheless persisting. 'We decided to separate. It had to be a total separation. The border wasn't enough. We needed silence as well' (Kristof, 1997, p. 331). With one of the twins crossing the border into a new territory and a new language, *The Proof* follows the one who returns to the grandmother's house, alone, enduring the same difficult circumstances. But in her autobiographical novel *The Illiterate*, Kristof chronicles another type of isolation, this time it is homelessness in the new language, the initial quietude, followed by the slow re-emergence of writing. If the twins in *The Notebook* used writing exercises as a mode of ascetic training, writing acquires a new, yet still formative role in Kristof's subsequent books. 'My last book, *The Illiterate*, is about the very condition of being homeless' (Kristof, Hungarian Literature Online, 2006), and in it, she delineates the self-creation of subjectivity through writing, but also traces its self-erasure via silence and homelessness in the new language. To put differently, in *The Notebook*, writing served primarily as an exercise in the training of detachment and desensitization, while in *The Proof*, *The Third Lie*, and *The Illiterate*, it performs exercises of creation, re-creation, and erasure. But in both cases, the formation of subjectivity is dependent on language itself, and more explicitly on writing, to make these exercises possible.

To demonstrate the power of the language to create and erase, Kristof weaves a complex net of interchangeable characters and narratives in the other two books of the

trilogy, and it retroactively becomes evident that *The Notebook* serves as only the first rendition of the story of the twins. The relationships we learned about in the first book, the people that were introduced as nameless, their roles and circumstances, are all questioned, retracted, or rearranged to the point where we are faced with many conflicting versions of the same stories. This, of course, is deliberate, as Kristof's original word in French that describes this, *l'histoire*, itself includes multiple meanings, including story as a fable. Without naming the places, Kristof is also writing about the specific time in the history of Europe, the era of post-war reconstruction and transformations in societies and in politics. Stories thus interweave with histories, fiction with factual events, and Kristof's trilogy itself becomes an allegory of these emerging multiplicities. Readers are thus constantly confused and disoriented, as the narrative becomes displaced, reshaped, and reorganised, in a parallel to Europe in the post-war period. Martha Kuhlman recognises that 'the narrative structure of the trilogy forms the architecture of a fictional labyrinth that can read as a parable for Europe' (Kuhlman, 2003, Abstract). In this way, personal stories are intertwined with the political and remain indistinguishable from history, and while we as readers are left with the exposed structure itself, we are unable to establish the narrative or define the specific designators. Thus, as the trilogy is created, it is also recreated, and sometimes erased; simultaneously, the same processes are identified in the story of Europe, as it is being written and rewritten, invented and reinvented after the war. With some chapters deleted or repressed from the stories of history (*l'histoire de l'histoire*), with meanings questionable, redistributed or relocated, Kristof instead focuses on the structure of invention and production of the stories as such. She plays with the names of the twins, Claus and Lucas in a way that reminisces of Otto Rank's often ghostly double ('*Doppelgänger*')⁴³. But what emerges in the trilogy is a fictional doubling of the subject, not the subject's double. As an authentically new type of subjectivity, Kristof's doubled subject is created in response to separation and loss, and in this way, the act of writing is always performed in homage to the missing other. Kristof reveals in an interview: 'I wanted to show that *The Notebook* was a lie. Lucas didn't live at his

⁴³ Rank's double refers to a representation of an ego which finds its depiction in a reflection, a doubling or as a twin, seemingly promising immortality, but actually foreshadowing death. Subsequently, Freud believes Rank's concept of the double generates the feeling of the uncanny, which occurs when the subject sees its own double, and the double takes the place of the subject. In the trilogy, this proves not to be the case.

grandmother's house with his twin brother. The embellishment was to refuse to describe the solitude, by inventing this double life, in which self-realisation was possible' (Savary, 1996). Hence the title of the final book of the trilogy, *The Third Lie*, is another fiction embedded in fiction. Without altogether giving up on the consistent narrative story line as such – something Beckett ultimately achieved in *The Unnamable* – she nonetheless invents new narratives, rearranges the characters, and reconstructs their worlds to the point of bare recognition. 'All this is a lie. I know very well that I was already alone in this town, with grandmother, that even then I only fantasized that there were two of us, me and my brother, in order to endure the unbearable solitude' (Kristof, 1997, p. 395). Thus, writing performs a function of not only self-creation, but also self-erasure, and a unique form of subjectivity is established through this process. Further elucidating self-creation, there is the village bookshop, one of the central characters of *The Proof*, which supplies the twins with paper in support of their discipline of writing as a practice in self-invention. And paper, throughout the trilogy, acts as sustenance for the twins, a form of nourishment which enables them to go on. With an urgency and necessity attached to it, the empty white sheets become like the daily bread, and the forbidden books which are smuggled from the library in *The Proof* become a sustaining force, a link to the former life, and another example of the materialities of encounter. Additionally, paper brings to light writing as a method of erasure, as we discover narratives that have been invented, imagined, or negated. 'You know very well that I'm just a dream. You must accept that. There is nothing anywhere (Kristof, 1997, p. 386). As practices of material encounters, self-creation and self-erasure endure as coextending.

Kristof's *The Notebook*, from 'Arrival at Grandmother's' to the concluding chapter 'The Separation', dramatizes the twins' self-preservation amidst war, abandonment, cold, hunger and deprivation. Strenuous exercises aimed at self-betterment and self-mastery become their mode of survival, Stoic *askēsis* becomes their adopted philosophy, but their goal veers from personal *Bildung* or virtue into mere survival. The ascetic practices are used, then discarded, morals are frowned upon,

prescribed ethical imperatives are rendered useless, and the twins armour themselves with the mastery of desensitization (again obtained through vigorous practice), detachment, and ultimately displacement. The student notebook with its empty pages provides them with the scaffolding for their exercises, a refuge from the difficulties of their lives, and a tool for exercising self-mastery. They develop practices of withholding assent to both positive and negative effects, to moral and ethical imperatives, and to all acts of mutual recognition, mastery, and power. They seek to remain untouched by human benevolence and charity, as well as by cruelty and depravity. The only code they subscribe to, and which I call anethics, is an ethics of self-preservation, inflected by Spinoza's *conatus* as a driving force of life: a will to live on. In this process, writing as an act and the notebook as a tool offer them a space for self-creation but also, as Kristof describes in *The Proof* and *The Third Lie*, for self-erasure. What remains are collaborative acts and forces, energies and bodies that are interacting, even as they resist their bodies being appropriated. And within this perseveres a desire for life as a material ethics of endurance based on the tenacity to withhold assent, to reject or to affirm, yet to continue, nevertheless.

Several of the themes investigated in this chapter are retraced again in the following chapter on J.M. Coetzee, and many link all three authors of this dissertation. The anethics of endurance connects them all and serves as a philosophical foundation for examining the notions of self-preservation and withholding assent, of the relationship between the mind and the body, of persistence on the edges of survival, but also of violence and death, writing and rewriting as forms of creation and re-creation, and ultimately of deletion and erasure. This is an exploration of their characters opening themselves to the edges and limits of what can possibly be endured, recognising, as Magda will in the chapter on Coetzee, that 'pain is everywhere these days, I must learn to subsist on it' (Coetzee, 2014, p. 43). This, I argue, is achieved by remaining on the surface and in the body with all its perceptions and sensations, sustained by self-preservation, propelled by the instinct of life as it interlaces itself with the desire for death. This embodied mode of anethics annuls dualisms of all kinds, including power relationships, the superiority of the mind over the body, and interiority over exteriority. Replacing them with relations of inter-connectedness and collaboration, it opens itself to vulnerability of others persisting in their being, and as such, in bareness of life.

Chapter 3

Persevering Life, Bodies and Desires in J. M. Coetzee

Introduction.

‘I want to live. As every man wants to live. To live and live and live. No matter what’. (Coetzee, 2010, p. 137). The Magistrate, in J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*, thus voices an insistent theme in his work, one which is found across a variety of figures and a variety of registers. It is the desire to endure, to persevere, to continue, to live on – despite the circumstances, ‘no matter what’. We can find it in any number of his characters: in *In the Heart of the Country*, it is the near-silent injunction of Magda’s inner voice: ‘Prolong yourself, prolong yourself, that is the whisper I hear in my inmost’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 6). It marks Michael K’s enduring fight to live on the edge of death: ‘He could feel the process of his body slowing down. You are forgetting to breathe, he would say to himself, and yet lie without breathing’ (Coetzee, 2004, p. 118). Even the mute cries of the dying dogs in *Disgrace* and the brutality of the life of immigrants Simon and David in more recent novels *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* serve as courageous testimonies to the will to persevere. Such characters perform as conceptual personae for varied, yet striking modes of endurance, as well as forms of subjectivity that are riven, shattered, attenuated, and subtracted, brought to the point of vanishing or to the seeming bareness of a *homo tantum*, a human devoid of any qualities. These are not pre-determined subjects in mastery of their own autonomy, they are not brought into their subjectivity by way of the dialectic of self and other, dependent on the recognition of others. As in the writing of Beckett and Kristof, Coetzee’s fiction introduces many liminal and marginalised figures which are faced with acting in extreme conditions of loss or of deprivation. Coetzee could be said to follow the ethical trajectory outlined by Beckett and Kristof, both of whom likewise draw characters frequently physically impaired, geographically isolated, and emotionally and socially riven. The question, then, becomes what type of ethics might emerge from the inveterate desire to live? How could we understand an ethics always on the brink of becoming mere survival, an ethics that does not eschew physical forces or impersonal affects in the name of rational self-interested choice or mutual

recognition, but takes as its terrain the varied and impermanent corporeal and material investments? To provide an initial answer to these questions, I will explore how Coetzee's characters' physicality and struggles provide further points of entry into a philosophical reading of an ethics founded upon the desire to endure. In this chapter, I will seek to map how an ethics based on the desire to live is dramatized through the sets of figures and relationships of endurance which his work lays bare. More specifically, I will do so by paying close attention to the encounters that shape Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), *Age of Iron* (1990), *Slow Man* (2005), and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). In many of these texts, Coetzee extensively interweaves the autobiographical and fictional, in which his 'life experience' is materially undone and recreated through his process of writing. As he deconstructs mastery, Coetzee does not so much collect or recollect fragments of his own life to build them into a mosaic of his literature, but rather allows for the text itself to write him as he is writing the text. 'Surely you revise. Isn't the whole of writing a matter of second thoughts – second thoughts and third thoughts and further thoughts' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 228)? It might be said that he is releasing the writing into the world as a subjectivity with its own *conatus*, as an independent force of life: as with Beckett and Kristof, the uncertain balance of writing and life forms an important thematic that traverses the philosophical and ethical questions his writing raises.

However, as in the previous chapters, I return to the Stoic premise that all beings (objects, humans and other animals, ideas, qualities, emotions, sensations, and of course all writing and all speech) are corporeal, and that corporeality consists in activity. This shift in the perception of the body displaces the centrality of the mind as the locus of ethical depth and interiority and inscribes a different form of embodied ethical subjectivity. That is, events of encounter – events that take place across surfaces of bodies in contact – point to an ethics not of pre-formed subjectivities but of interactive yet sometimes volatile assemblages of capabilities, desires, and intensities or affects. An ethics of corporeal surfaces moves away from one figured as a dialectic of subjective interiorities premised on dualist ontologies of mind and body as in Plato, Descartes, Kant, or Hegel. This corporeal, productive subjectivity serves as the guiding premise for this dissertation and as the departure point for this chapter, insofar as it considers Coetzee's series of moments of encounters among conflicted, lost, and riven characters

who are examining their own existence, while struggling to persevere. The ethics of relentless endurance of corporeal subjects in their desire for life, together with their practice of withholding assent to all forms of dialectics of alterity and mastery, leads to a position of detached attachment and ultimately to an anethics of mere survival. As I have already established in this dissertation, anethics⁴⁴ indicates a space that is neither ethical nor unethical, and as such is prior, above, or beyond any metaphysics of good or evil that might predetermine ethical behaviour. In such a way, anethics is devoid of adjudication as it entails a categorical refusal of imperatives: whether the Kantian categorical imperative ('act as if your maxim were universalisable') or, as Lacan argues, its Sadean fulfilment in universal cruelty ('act as if you could take your pleasure in others, universally'). Therefore, anethics, disarmed of all judgement regarding behaviour, and disburdened from acting in the name of good or in seeking virtue, opens an attenuated space of vulnerability and of the contingency of encounters of afflicted bodies. It is this attenuated space that captivates Coetzee, as he traces the collaborations of acts, of proximities and interacting surfaces that are reduced to bare minima, while human life is reduced to bare survival.

Thus, Coetzee's characters limn an ethics of the desire to live in terms of encounters: an encounter in which the 'nakedness' of the face of the other places an ethical demand of responsibility upon an other. Derek Attridge's *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2004), following Levinasian (and Derridean) philosophical exploration of the ethics of alterity, therefore reads Coetzee's 'literary event' as 'the working out of a complex and freighted responsibility to and for the other', a responsibility which, in turn, places 'inescapable demands' on the reader (Attridge, 2004, p. 31). Attridge reads *Age of Iron*, then, not as an ethical allegory for death and love, or as political or historical portrayal of an ethics specific to 1980s South Africa, but rather as a description of 'how a person with a particular background might experience terminal illness, violent political oppression, the embrace of someone who is entirely other' (Attridge, 2004, p. 63). As such, Attridge opens the space of literature as a space of ethical reciprocity between others or takes literature as mediating an ethics of alterity.

⁴⁴ As referenced in the Introduction, I borrow the term from Shane Weller who examines this notion in his book *Beckett, Literature and the Ethics of Alterity* (2006), but in this dissertation, I develop a markedly different definition of anethics.

While this is meaningful, I also want to argue, the encounters with otherness that Coetzee's characters enter into postulate an ethics of undoing the face of the other, of withholding the recognition of the other, or of refusing one's responsibility to the other. The intersubjective face-to-face encounter with an other in Coetzee (as well as in Beckett and Kristof) is often a failed encounter, or it seems more akin to a mutual desubjectification. What happens in Coetzee is an undoing of the otherness of the other, wherein the endpoint isn't the singularity of the other's irreducible alterity, but an experience, violent or empathetic, of shared vulnerability. Or, at the same time, it is a refusal to enter into a dialectics of alterity in the first place. To explore this, I will extend Anthony Uhlmann's notion of ethics as 'undoing' or Stoic 'withholding assent' in Beckett's work which I developed in chapter one. I consider withholding assent to be an active practice of deliberate non-responsivity, one which replaces ethical imperatives, and which in turn enables an active practice of detached attachment. Both active practices ultimately assist in the development and expansion of an ethics of endurance.

Coetzee often starts with his characters' ethical aberrations: their failures to find the best relations for themselves, or their inability or incapacity to persevere in their being. We regularly encounter examples of self-harm, violence towards oneself and self-destructive relations with others, as well as the outright desire for death. We face a mutual refusal of responsibility, and the irresolution of any triangulated ethical relationship with the reader. What I want to emphasize here, consequently, is how Coetzee describes the ethical encounter as a microphysics of bodies⁴⁵ who meet under material or psychological duress, of bodies rendered minimal by peril or pain, which are nonetheless suffused by the desire to live. In a way that has affinities with Coetzee's writing, Elizabeth Grosz outlines a way of understanding an ethics of encounter centred on 'forces and powers':

Ethics is a movement oriented by encounters with others, other human institutions, other living beings, and the non-living material order that constitutes the whole of nature, an ethics not based on autonomy and self-containment, the quelling of external impingements, but through engagements that enhance or deplete one's powers. The encounters a body undergoes elaborate, develop, transform the powers of the nature of bodies and thought to act to be acted upon;

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault explains this in detail in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), one of the most extensive studies on the significance, the control, and the politics of bodies.

living beings are not autonomous entities but capacities for embodied engagement, action, and conceptualisation that are strengthened or weakened by their relations with other forces and powers (Grosz, 2017, p. 56, 57).

It is through such an ethics conceived as a microphysics of bodies in movement, rather than the face-to-face encounter of two self-contained autonomous others, that the desire to live is manifested in Coetzee's work. It is an ethics of endurance, then, not predicated on the mutual recognition of the other's otherness, or our readerly recognition of this. In Coetzee, survival often takes courage, a courage which empowers Michael K to continue in his idleness, Magda to perform her own acts of survival, Elizabeth Curren to face her own dying, or Paul Rayment to live on in the wake of an accident in which his leg is amputated. By viewing such characters' bodies in terms of their 'capacities for embodied engagement, action, and conceptualization', as bodies that enter into empowering or disempowering relations, we can better understand how Coetzee's ethics can both be predicated on a secular fortitude – on the physical strength to withhold assent or to affirm, and to nonetheless continue –, *and* as fundamentally coupled with a radical ontological vulnerability. An ethics of endurance is at stake both in the fullness of the desire to live and when the desire to live is suppressed or taken away.

Of course, critics have long understood Coetzee's limiting of his characters' possibilities in terms of a postcolonial politics, or by relating his figures of survival to his estranged pictures of brutal frontier or postcolonial life: 'You know how I live here on the farm, totally outside human society, almost outside humanity! ... What more do you want? Must I weep? Must I kneel?' (Coetzee, 2014, p. 146). Here I want to extract from his writing's political contexts the form through which he creates a series of figures as blank examples of survival. What is key, I want to suggest, is how Coetzee introduces the act of withholding assent and the position of detached attachment, and simultaneously undoes the scene of mastery and the reciprocity of alterity that underlies ethics. It is not just that characters endure, or that they play out a Beckettian drama of 'failing better'. As enduring to the seeming point of imperceptibility, they also undo the mastery of those that purport not only to suppress them, but also to save them. Again, for Hegel, no slave can exist without the master (and vice-versa), no position of bondage without the existence of lordship. So, what is withheld in Coetzee's liminal figures is the assent of becoming the other to an other: ultimately, his characters refuse to be recognised by an other. In *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial*

Entanglements (2018), Julietta Singh shows how Michael K's refusal to accede to the 'humanitarian fetish' of assistance by the figure of the medical officer nonetheless reveals intransigent force of the paradigm of mastery: 'Coetzee's novel brings humanitarian fetishism to crisis while he illustrates through the language of the humanitarian that this fetishism cannot simply be overturned by a desire for noncoercive social relations. The medical officer's failure to move out of a paradigm of mastery reveals the unremitting force of humanitarian fetishism' (Singh, 2018, p. 114). Here, we could also recall Deleuze's reading in 'Bartleby; Or, the Formula' (1997 a), in which Bartleby's non-preference undoes the dynamic of paternal charity through which the attorney would help, save, or even love him; but instead, 'something strange happens, something that blurs the image, marks it with an essential uncertainty, keeps the form from 'taking', but also undoes the subject, sets it adrift and abolishes any paternal function' (Deleuze, 1997 a, p. 77). The paternal charity fails, while Bartleby remains in indetermination. Michael K, like Bartleby, withholds his assent and through this act of non-engagement, Coetzee examines the possibility of an ethics without the appropriation of mastery.

While this is of key importance, I also want to focus here on how survival entails such complete vulnerability, how it signals a place of sheer openness to the limits of what can be endured and withstood. I trace this through a detailed account of the characters' practices of withholding assent and detached attachment, in the name of an anethics of endurance as bare survival. While death and violence, if not extreme brutality, are major themes in Coetzee's work, even through all their instantiations, we can still discern a desire to persevere, to live on, no matter what. This is again voiced by the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*: 'This is not the scene I dreamed of. Like much else nowadays I leave feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that might lead to nowhere' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 180). At these liminal points, seemingly devoid of joyful affects, the striving to persevere appears at its most extreme, yet it is here where anethics becomes legible.

1. *Violence and Survival: In the Heart of the Country.*

‘Prolong yourself, prolong yourself, that is the whisper I feel in my utmost’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 6).

The remote, desert-like surroundings are also the background of Coetzee’s second, and stylistically perhaps the most inventive novel, *In the Heart of the Country*. Set in South Africa, the main character’s destitute isolation, the sense of blurred reality and fiction, the unsurmountable challenges of the relationship with her black servants, and the meditative idleness of life on the farm on the verge of a desert all set the tone of the novel. Many years later, Coetzee relocates another character onto an isolated farm, as David Lurie in *Disgrace* abandons his life in the city and moves to his daughter’s homestead. Both examples serve as backgrounds for one of South Africa’s gravest symbols of its racist, painful, violent, and complex history.

The desolation is reflected in Magda’s chronicle of her days of solitary contemplation of her secluded existence. ‘There are, it seems no angels in this part of the sky, no God in this part of the world. It belongs only to the sun. I do not think it was ever intended that people should live here. This is a land made for insects who eat and lay eggs in each other’s corpses and have no voices with which to scream when they die’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 134). In this stark environment and in precisely 266 often incohesive segments, riddled with gaps and discontinuities, Magda is documenting her long days and perpetually rewriting the traumatic, possibly imaginary events which befell her: the brutal killing of her father and his new bride (both of whom she violently executes, and then describes in horrendous detail); the removal of her father’s body, which she painstakingly performs; and, her repeated rape by the farm worker Hendrik. Coetzee offers a series of vivid yet restrained scenes of extreme violence, with accounts oscillating between Magda as both victim and perpetrator, but which are marked by her detachment from the events and from herself. It is as if she were only an observer, detailing these accounts thoroughly, yet objectively.

If I am an emblem then I am an emblem. I am incomplete, I am a being with a hole inside me, I signify something, I do not know what, I am dumb, I stare out through a sheet of glass into a darkness that is complete, that lives in itself, bats, bushes, predators and all, that does not regard me, that is blind, that does not signify but merely is. [...] I live inside a skin inside a house. There is no act I know of that will liberate me into the world. There is no act I know that will bring the world into me. I am a torrent of sound streaming into the universe, thousands upon thousands of corpuscles weeping, groaning, gnashing their teeth (Coetzee, 2014, p. 11).

Magda is ontologically incomplete, a subject riven, in seeming counterpoint to the immanence of ‘complete’ darkness beyond her and her house; a self-distance opens within her, as if she were nurturing inside herself a void of an almost Lacanian modality.⁴⁶ The hole inside her is fundamental to her being inasmuch as it drives her actions, but it might also signify something, though she does not know what. A series of conflicting, if not contradictory, imperatives could be said to ‘shape’ Magda as riven: human/nonhuman, inside/outside, incomplete/complete, material/immaterial, signifying/a-signifying, mute/ as ‘a torrent of sound’, all of which leave her ultimately paralyzed. This goes to the level of her corporeality, of which Magda is fully aware, in a way that verges on the sexual passivity: ‘I move through the world not as a knifeblade cutting the wind, or as a tower with eyes, like my father, but as a hole, a hole with a body draped around it, the two spindly legs hanging loose at the bottom and the two bony arms flapping at the sides and the big head lolling on top. I am a hole crying to be whole’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 50). In this space of self-remoteness, self-incompleteness, and paralyzed passivity, she is not an *a priori* established subject, constructed to create, experience, or participate in the world around her. Rather, she is established only through these experiences, through and by acts, and created by her words which likewise come from outside of her: ‘What I say does not come from me.’ I create myself and the words that create me’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 9). Therefore, she proceeds to write various versions of the same event, whether it is butchering her father and stepmother, or being sexually assaulted by Hendrik, and in each of the versions, she creates a new experience, as well as a different self. As such, these experiences and her words simultaneously serve to erase her: writing as much as it is an act of self-creation or preservation, it is at once an act of self-erasure and disappearance. This writing/erasing happens across the surface of her body: across her skin within a house

⁴⁶ Lack, also sometimes translated as void (*manqué* in French) is a complex concept in Lacan’s philosophy of psychoanalysis and is in its comprehensiveness outside of the scope of this chapter. Yet it is also crucial for understanding the hole that Magda is referring to, as it does not apply to a specific thing which might be lacking, or something that a person might miss, but rather to the lack within the being itself. This lack of being is furthermore related to the desire and is consequently very far from the lack of having, which refers to a demand. As such, this void is the place from which one acts, insofar as it serves as a driving mechanism of desire, a productive force driving one’s life.

looking out at the flat sheet of night, across a body draped around a hole. Coetzee often maintains this doubleness, of self-writing and self-erasure, creating, re-creating and de-creating his characters (as well as his own fictional avatars) to the extent that they could be said to exist only barely. In so doing, he recalls Beckett's trilogy, in which, through rewriting and recreating passages, involuting and erasing themselves, Beckett keeps the reader in a constant state of narrative uncertainty; Kristof achieves a similar effect when she constructs, then questions, and finally rewrites the story of the twins. All three attempts aim to redirect our attention from the narrative as a cohesive and coherent form, toward the awareness and alertness to their texts on other levels. Even if the logic of the narrative might fail, failure for them is a source of power – the philosophy of failure is as consistent and audible as are the novels' emotional currents. By the end of *In the Heart of the Country*, we are unsure whether any of the stories are indeed true, and consequently the only certainty we have is that of Magda (un-)writing herself through them, reinventing herself and recreating the traumatic world in which she lives. It is an incomplete process of becoming-other, in which the materiality of language and the materiality of her body is co-implicated: 'Because I am here to set them vibrating with their own variety of material awareness that I am forever not they, and they not I, that I can never be the rupture of pure self that they are but am alas forever set off from them by the babble of words within me that fabricate and refabricate me as something else, something else' (Coetzee, 2014, p. 60). As in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the scene of alterity is rendered as the desire to set the other vibrating within material awareness, and as the open-ended babble of words welling up in her that construes and corporealizes self-difference.

Yet as much as Magda is always attempting to construct new stories and rewrite herself through them, as much as she is surrendering to the incessant current of her consciousness, she seems to be more drawn to the non-human corporealities in order to articulate her human embodiment. Throughout the novel, she compares herself to a Kafkaesque 'thin black beetle', to a 'hermit crab', and to 'fish in water'; she contemplates 'crawling under a stone', or 'hiding under a bush', and throughout her narration, she appears to be more animal than human, more nature than logic, more perception than cognition. To be sure, Coetzee's fictional menagerie is well documented: his writing is crowded with animals, both as characters and as

metaphors.⁴⁷ In *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda is obsessed with the immanence and interiority of everything: humans, animals, and all non-human things. As such, she becomes ‘a poetess of interiority, an explorer of the inwardness of stones, the emotions of ants, the consciousness of the thinking parts of the brain. It seems to be the only career, if we except death, for which life in the desert had fitted me’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 43). Yet, as Yoshiki Tajiri suggests, ‘the more she yearns for a non-human mode of being (‘the mode of being practiced by goats or stones’), the more keenly conscious she must be, in the end, of the unpalatable fact that in contrast to goats or stones she is burdened with self-consciousness and language’ (Tajiri, 2016, p. 386). This is to say that Magda is not only shaped by the contradictory forces of inside/outside, human/non-human or voice/silence, but the fact that she is human, that she has a subjective interiority, and that is capable of expressing this interiority through language only serve to further paralyze or oppress her; the surface serves as the space of intersection, a connective link between the inside and the outside, the junction of the corporeal and the incorporeal. For Magda, the burden of thoughts and words is not ‘palatable’ (to use Tajiri’s term), but nonetheless she is compelled to write. Coetzee’s double gesture is to both show her as naturalized and denaturalized (or humanized and dehumanized). Magda consequently reflects on the interiority of all beings, including herself, most poignantly and disturbingly while she is being raped. She appears to be invariably negotiating between the fidelity to immanence and the striving for authentic connection, with humans, material objects, animals, and at the very end of the novel, even gods. In such a way, she represents a writer and embodied subjectivity metaphorically as well as materially torn.

And so, despite the intensity of her solitude, Magda is tragically attached to other humans, especially to her rapist Hendrik and his wife, Klein Anna. With her father

⁴⁷ Aside from *In the Heart of the Country*, there are copious examples in other novels, too: in *Age of Iron*, Mr. Vercueil, who owns a dog, is described as having ‘carious fangs’ and being ‘the first of the carrion birds’; Mrs. Curren describes her cancer as a ‘crab eating her from the inside’ and her soul as ‘a moth’; In *Disgrace*, famously saturated with images of dogs, Melanie ‘burrows like a mole’ and Lurie is compared to a ‘moral dinosaur’; In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the barbarian girl is compared to a ‘wild animal’, while the Magistrate is ‘whining like a dog’, and Colonel Joll has ‘two black glassy insect eyes’ (insects are undoubtedly some of his favorite forms of beings, as well as types of metaphors). But the one metaphor which stands out quite persuasively and pertains specifically to writing itself, is Eugene Dawn in *Dusklands* describing his attempts as ‘secreting words as the spider connects the web’.

dead (or perhaps alive), she seeks not only their companionship, but also their recognition. Coetzee repeatedly invokes the Hegelian master-slave dynamic between them; he describes not only the initial power dynamic of Magda as the master and Hendrik with his wife as slaves, but, in much greater detail and complexity, the desperate plea of Magda for their recognition, as well as the ultimate reversal of the roles. In a passage that explicitly rewrites the scene of the master and slave in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Magda hears a voice saying: 'It is the slave's consciousness that constitutes the master's certainty of his own truth. But the slave's consciousness is a dependent consciousness. So the master is not sure of the truth of his autonomy. His truth lies in an inessential consciousness and its essential acts' (Coetzee, 2014, p.161). It is worth noting that in Hegel's dialectic, the master can only claim this position in relation to the slave, outside of this relationship he loses all power, and similarly, bondage is only possible in opposition to lordship. This dialectic, according to Hegel, is of course performed on both subjective and intersubjective levels, in the mind of the individual, as well as in the society, therefore both as self-consciousness developing into itself, as well as a society, achieving its freedom. Furthermore, both the internal and the external processes unfold in the same way and result in the equivalent unification of the subject and the object, a higher unity in the state of self-consciousness. Yet for this state to be attained, the master-slave relationship must advance through the challenge of striving for recognition, one which a battle to death fails to achieve; death is simply not the answer, thus a different resolution is needed, either as agreement or subordination, or, as I suggest within anethics of endurance, as detached attachment.

We see this struggle unfold in the relationship between Magda and Hendrik, which oscillates in its power dynamics between one and the other. This consequently implies that, whilst the power might shift from Magda to Hendrik (who demonstrates his dominance through the unimaginable brutality of repeated rape), the relationship lacks a final resolution, and mutual respect and equality are never reached. 'Slaves lose everything in their chains, I recognize, even joy in escaping from them' (Coetzee, 2014, p. 148). Thus, when Hendrik and his wife leave the farm abruptly and unexpectedly, Magda is left on her own, with the relationship unresolved, and all the wounds remaining open and raw. She remains a riven and torn subject, an embodied hole, never whole, and never arriving to the position of detached attachment to the dialectics of mastery. Residing firmly in the interchangeable stance of a master or a slave in the

relationship with Hendrik and Klein Anna, Magda stays in it even after their departure. In order to develop an attitude of detached attachment, it is imperative to withhold assent to all forms of mastery, yet as Magda is unable to resist, she remains entangled in the master-slave dialectic which symbolically persists and effectively operates long after the participants of the relationship are physically gone. Anethics of endurance, as any ethics, exists as a mode of acting, a way of engaging with others, a manner of living. And as such, it is contingent on the comportment of withholding assent to forms of dominance which enable a non-appropriative interspace of vulnerability without subjection. But Magda elects a different outcome: 'I have chosen at every moment my own destiny, which is to die here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father's bones, in a space echoing with hymns I could have written but did not because (I thought) it was too easy' (Coetzee, 2014, p. 172). Instead of the alternative, which she considered to be 'too easy', she chooses to dwell in the vicinity of her 'father's bones' and of his violent legacy as a brutal master to slaves, thus repeating the dialectic of slavery and recycling the mastery, without herself being able to renounce it. Detached attachment, for Magda, might seem as too simple a choice to pursue. But it stands as an uncharted option which allows for the differences, the particularities, the powerlessness, and the vulnerabilities to exist in their sovereignty outside the paradigm of mastery.

The desire for recognition and the subjectivity that is purportedly produced by it, either in a Levinasian or Hegelian manner, is thus shown to be an unresolvable process, one that involves self-destruction as much as self-assertion. Magda's desire to survive is at once a desire to self-erase. Her desire to persevere in her being is the desire not to attain what she desires (which would negate the desire), but just to continue desiring. 'I am not one of the heroes of desire, what I want is not infinite or unattainable, all I ask myself, faintly, dubiously, querulously, is whether there is not something to do with desire other than striving to possess the desired in a project which must be vain, since its end can only be the annihilation of the desired' (Coetzee, 2014, p. 142). Or, similarly, 'It is a principle of life forever to be unfulfilled. Fulfilment does not fulfil. Only stones desire nothing. And who knows, perhaps in stones there are also holes we have never discovered' (Coetzee, 2014, p. 142). This is not to say that Magda does not desire a life completely independent of others, or that Coetzee is advocating a hermetic life shorn of attachments. Yet this attachment to a community does not entail that recognition is dependent on it, or that subjectivity is structured by it. Magda's quest for

survival is committed to the endurance of pain, to the lack of wholeness, and the perpetual course of desire, but not in complete detachment from others. With Magda, Coetzee shows how the desire for self-preservation can sometimes conflict with the desire for recognition, and how the pursuit of belonging and the yearning for inclusion can open a set of challenging and inconsistent desires that mark our power to persevere. Eventually, Magda becomes a figure abandoned, rather than a figure of flight. ‘If the truth be told, I never wanted to fly away with the skygods. My hope was always that they would descend and live with me here in paradise, making up with their ambrosial breath for all that I lost when the ghostly brown figures of the last people I knew crept away from me in the night’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 172). After everyone leaves, she stays and endures in her isolation, and after a few unsuccessful attempts to seek help, she chooses to not return to society, but instead to remain on the farm, sit with her pain. Her seclusion becomes complete, and the tone from the beginning of the novel ‘I live, I suffer, I am here’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 4), persistent. As much as she declares that ‘this is no way to live’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 119), it emerges that this is, actually, the only way to live: persevering in her being, beyond the desire for recognition, beyond the search for empowering relations. Persevering in her suffering, in utter vulnerability, continuing. Opening herself to the limits of what can be endured, thrusting herself to the breaking point of her subjectivity. Magda would agree with Kristof’s twins: ‘pleasure is hard to come by, but pain is everywhere these days, I must learn to subsist on it’ (Coetzee, 2014, p. 43).

2. *Anethics of Bodies and Surfaces: Detached Attachment in Waiting for the Barbarians.*

‘I change my position to kneel not in front of her but beside her’ (Coetzee, 2010, p. 32).

Coetzee’s third novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, is set in an unidentified empire in an unspecified place in a desert, and in an unknown time in history. He blurs the fictive with the real, oscillating between familiarising and defamiliarising the context of the novel to allow the reader a variety of epistemological approaches to the text. As Jan Wilm writes: ‘Coetzee’s worlds *build up* real worlds and thereby establish paradoxical and productive links between reality and fiction for the reader to reflect’ (Wilm, 2016,

p. 210). Written in the first person by the old Magistrate, who is currently in charge of the small frontier settlement, it is an account of the life on the outskirts of an empire. After witnessing brutal acts of torture and then disagreeing with the interrogator in charge of the questioning (and the torturing of) the 'barbarians', he is ultimately punished and jailed for his alleged betrayal. But it is the relationship with the barbarians, and eventually with one of their girls, which initiates a radical self-examination of his prejudices and beliefs, as well as an astonishing personal awakening which results in a uniquely intimate relationship with the girl.

As befits a writer whose philosophical style is inflected by the work of Kafka or Beckett, Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a text of torturous slowness. Many critics, in thinking through its ethical and political stakes, therefore, highlight the modality of temporal endurance as the ground of its ethical encounters. In *The Slow Philosophy of J.M. Coetzee*, Wilm analyses the unfolding of the relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl, suggesting how it becomes manifest through an attenuated present, the time of mutual waiting:

During the long nights, when the Magistrate is caring for the girl, both the narrative and his own existence slow down. The political time of history, of the Empire, is slowly undermined, while the present moment, the caring moment, is emphasized and foregrounded. The present becomes embodied in the event of experiencing the moment in all its precariousness, and attachment can only be conveyed in the revered shared moments between the Magistrate and the girl. At the beginning, the Magistrate confesses to 'us(ing) her body' (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, p. 32) for his own gratification, he eventually forms a much less egotistical attachment to her, which consequently becomes the precondition for a more ethical detachment from her. Thereby, he chooses (perhaps subconsciously) a form of deep engagement with another person that paradoxically expresses itself in separation, the way love can sometimes only let go. Through the privileging of the present moment, the Magistrate is attentive to another person's being. Ultimately, this makes him deprive his own plans for a future and allows the overcoming of his own desire to hold on to the girl. His initial holding on to her prepares him to let her go (Wilm, 2016, p. 29).

As such, the unfolding of an ethics of endurance in this novel could be said to take shape through the slow time of the encounter between the Magistrate and the girl. Their relationship is set against, and often working against, the slow temporality of an undefined empire in decay. Frequently, letting go is the purest mode of attachment, and the Magistrate slowly learns to detach from the girl, while he simultaneously distances himself from the empire and his own role in it. For Wilm, the 'ethical detachment' is at once a process of becoming 'attentive' or recognizing her 'being' as well as a

simultaneous process of letting go. Coetzee refuses to be prescriptive, moralising, or calculative; rather, he is open to meditative reflection on the present, which is enabled by the slow reading Wilm suggests. Furthermore, the Magistrate lingers on the outskirts of the physical, of the self and of desire, in an endeavour to remain unattached, and to avoid the dangers of the power of unattainable desire, which remains caught in a perpetual circle of unsuccessful grasping of the desired. Detached attachment allows him to be empathetic with the girl, it enables him to sit with her in the aftermath of her violent trauma, and it subsequently opens a space of compassion towards her people. In this regard, the only path to genuine attachment is through detachment as a way of allowing her to exist in her singularity, as the only ethical choice is the one of letting go.

The time of waiting enables us to rethink the text from the perspective of an ethics as an encounter of two individuals at pains to persevere in their being. It is not only that waiting affords the Magistrate to recognise the girl's being, rather, we find the repeated ethical *non-recognition* of the girl of the Magistrate. As if to complicate the specular scene of mutual recognition circumscribed in Levinas's ethics, Coetzee instead offers in the novel several scenes of the failure of the reciprocal gaze of self and other. He makes a point to tell us that the girl is not blind, but her gaze is averted, or his gaze is not returned:

She sits staring eerily ahead of her.
 'Look at me', I say.
 'I am looking. This is how I look'.
 I wave a hand in front of her eyes. She blinks. I bring my face closer and stare into her eyes. She wheels her gaze from the wall on to me. The black irises are set off by milky whites as clear as a child's. I touch her cheek: she starts.
 'I asked how you make a living'.
 She shrugs. 'I do washing'.
 'Where do you live'?
 'I live' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 30).

The ethical space the girl inhabits here is fundamentally the state of endurance as pure survival, yet in another instance, Coetzee describes their ethical interchange as a function of the girl's occluded gaze: 'It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her. ... I look into the eye. Am I to believe that gazing back at me she sees nothing - my feet perhaps, parts of the room, a hazy circle of light, but at the centre, where I am, only a blur, a blank?' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 35, 36). The gaze of the girl, as imputed 'other', is

not returned, and the specular encounter of alterity consequently fails: 'and with a shift of horror I behold the answer that has been waiting all the time offer itself to me in the image of a face masked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only my doubled image cast back at me' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 50). Coetzee obfuscates the face-to-face encounter through a series of masks. Not only is the girl's face masked 'by two glassy insect eyes', the Magistrate's interrogator disallows any face-to-face encounter: 'It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 8). But what is clear from these passages is that rather than mutual recognition, a series of proximities, or surfaces constitute the place of ethical attachment/detachment and shape how we might understand its multifarious presentations of persevering life. Put differently, even as the girl does not return the gaze of the Magistrate – itself at once complexly a metonymy for the Imperial gaze and its dissociation – the two open a space of ethical involvement based less on a dialectic of self and other, and more on mutual acts of non-appropriative touching, of detached attachment. In this, she underwrites the Magistrate's ultimate fidelity to her, namely his fidelity to her singular mode of perseverance, and to his letting her go. She might see in him merely a blur, a blankness, and he might merely see himself projected back to himself (another failure of the self-other dynamic), but through these acts they still endeavour, together, to endure, to live on.

We can further consider some of the passages in which Coetzee's 'surface ethics' in the novel emerges. Rather than an other that summons the ethical commandment of responsibility, the barbarian girl becomes to the Magistrate at times a seemingly pure surface: 'But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 49)? The surface ethics Coetzee outlines finds its most compelling expression in the scene in which the Magistrate is washing the barbarian girl's body. 'I wash slowly, working up a lather, gripping her firm-fleshed calves, manipulating the bones and tendons of her feet, running my fingers between her toes. ... I lose myself in the rhythm of what I am doing. I lose awareness of the girl herself. There is a space of time which is blank to me: perhaps I am not even present' (Coetzee, 2010, p. 32). Here, the Magistrate does not truly and fully engage with the girl, theirs is not an encounter of two subjects who

mutually recognise each other. Their mutual vulnerability is revealed on the surfaces of their bodies, they do not convene face-to-face, nor as two subjects, but rather within the minimal distance of the separation from one another. The only attainable attachment is through the skin, the smooth surface of the body, with eyes closed, whilst falling asleep. In these terms, the ethical relationship of the Magistrate and the unnamed girl is less a dialectic of the self and the other than a series of indeterminate collaborative acts that foreground not the mutual vulnerability of the face-to-face relation, but its perpetual obscuring. The Magistrate and the girl are mutually vulnerable; but the scene of this vulnerability is the interaction of touching bodies, of a desire which registers its own pathos of distance rather than its cloying need to appropriate the other. The girl remains to the Magistrate inscrutable and elsewhere, even as she is close at hand. ‘Did I really want to enter and claim possession of these beautiful creatures? Desire seemed to bring with it a pathos of distance and separation which it was futile to deny’ (Coetzee, 2010, p. 51). It is as if Coetzee extends the *topos* of the ethical encounter – the nudity of the face – to the whole of her body as he rubs it with oils and dries it. The Magistrate, like the girl, becomes a washer who merely wants to live.

The sequence of passages in which he is washing her body should not be understood as an attempt of the Magistrate to wash away the ‘taint’ of her otherness or as a build-up to erotic mastery. Conjugated through the ‘pathos of distance’, even their eventual ‘collaborative act’ (Coetzee, 2010, p. 50) as his hand passes between her legs, is carefully rendered not as a moment of sexual gratification. Instead, we might understand it through what Elizabeth Grosz has called a ‘politics of imperceptibility’. For Grosz, that is, the site of ethics is not a face-to-face encounter of mutual seeing, but of the embracing of opacity. For the Magistrate, as Wilm likewise insinuates, the site of detachment becomes the site of engaged empathy. But this is less because the Magistrate comes to recognize her in her being than because, by withholding recognition, she opens a new terrain of ethics, one that does not rely on an otherness that only impedes her liberation, but in fact brings it to pass.

3. *Withholding Assent in Life & Times of Michael K.*

‘The body, I had been taught, wants only to live’ (Coetzee, 2004, p. 164).

Striving for ontological perseverance is something many of Coetzee's characters experience. Yet no one strives alone, and every singularity is inevitably intertwined with others. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* and in *In the Heart of the Country*, this singular-plural striving emerges through relationships of detached attachment, and I will continue to trace this theme in *Age of Iron* and *Diary of a Bad Year* as linked not only to the relationship between master and slave, but also as it becomes manifest in *Life & Times of Michael K* in terms of a complex and multiple connection of bodies and the land.

Coetzee's ethics of endurance performs various understandings of engaged empathy. Following *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and again set amid civil unrest and uncertainty (this time during South African apartheid), *Life & Times of Michael K* offers one of Coetzee's most pronounced examples of anethics as mere survival, withholding assent and detached attachment. Not unlike Beckett, Coetzee renders his desubjectified subjects in the novel through an endless play of beginnings and endings: Michael K goes from the city to the farm, from the work camp into the mountains, from severe starvation to hospital confinement, from abandonment to desolation, and finally, back to his mother's flat in Cape Town, where the novel had begun. But, in so doing, Michael K's endeavour to return his mother's ashes back to the farm brings to the fore several key interrelated themes through which anethics is realized: namely, the vulnerability of liminal bodies; dying presented as a form of affirmative life; a series of failed attempts for recognition and attachment, and a consequent breakdown of the dialectics of master and slave; and, a common theme for Coetzee, a version of ethics articulated through the relationship between the human and non-human.

As was the case with the surface ethics he develops in terms of the Magistrate's relation to the barbarian girl, in *Life & Times of Michael K* Coetzee invites us to remain on the surface, and to remain at the level of the body and sensation. Here, the physical surfaces of Michael K's body merge with the silences and the gaps in his speaking, silences that are 'in-corporated' or physicalized in the form of his cleft palate as the incorporeal condition of the material body. The incorporeal does not (need to) come into being to have meaning; indeed, Michael K's silence signifies his ethical stand, as his inability to speak becomes the site of his becoming imperceptible. Moving past Bartleby's laconic formula for departicularisation, 'I would prefer not to', Michael K does not answer the medical officer's questions, he rejects food or care of any kind and,

in so doing, ultimately spurns the ethical dynamics of mutual recognition, if not human reciprocity. By refusing to engage with an other, Michael K rejects dependency as well as the traps of paternal charity: 'I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity, too' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 182). What is more, the surface of Michael K's body is marked by writing 'CM',⁴⁸ which serves as the only reference to his skin colour in the novel, but which also literalizes race as a form of writing, albeit one that, again, physicalizes his silence. Such embodied silences, in effect, become his predominant mode of communication, which is in turn compounded by the fact that Michael K also appears to have limited cognitive abilities. Throughout the novel, he is compared to various animals, stones, and metaphors which collectively serve to dehumanize or disempower him, at least in the eyes of those who oppress him. The medical officer in the rehabilitation camp, who initially treats him with sympathy (if not empathy), nonetheless reduces him to a non-human entity:

[Y]ou are like a stick insect, Michaels, whose sole defence against a universe of predators is its bizarre shape. You are like a stick insect that has landed, God knows how, in the middle of a great flat bare concrete plain. You raise your slow fragile stick-legs one at a time, you inch about looking for something to merge with, and there is nothing (Coetzee, 2004, p. 149).

'Michaels', as he is referred to here by the medical officer, is seen as a being lacking self-awareness, perhaps even self-consciousness, someone who is pure body. Similarly, he is compared to 'a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time... a hard little stone, barely aware of its surroundings, enveloped in itself and its interior life' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 135), and described as 'a mouse who quit an overcrowded, foundering ship' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 136). As Michael K foreswears his charity, the officer becomes much less favourable, perhaps even aggrieved, toward him, but again expresses this through an animal analogy: 'putting you through the motions of rehabilitation would have been like trying to teach a rat or a

⁴⁸ 'Coloured Male', as he is categorised at the camp, is the only reference to the colour of his skin in the novel. Nadine Gordimer, in her famous essay 'The Idea of Gardening: Life and Times of Michael K', notably insists that the K in Michael's name does not refer to Kafka or any of his characters, as secondary criticism so often alludes to, but in fact stands for Kotze or Koekenmoer, which not only offer a play on Coetzee's own name, something he will often turn into a ludic practice of obscured self-reference, but are more significantly black names.

mouse or (dare I say it) a lizard to bark and beg and catch a ball' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 163).

Yet, at the same time, Coetzee suggests that his nonhuman relationships might also open him to alternative modes of empowerment or confederate forms of being. And Michael K's inability to reciprocate verges on transforming into a non-human mode of expression. The medical officer's desperate attempts at understanding him ultimately lead to a failed mutual recognition, which results in the collapse of their human-to-human ethical encounter, as well as the reciprocal alterity predicated on the acknowledgment of the other's otherness. By not engaging in a relationship with the officer, Michael K not only withholds reciprocal human recognition (the officer is clearly irritated by this), but he also undoes the dynamic through which both sympathy and mastery can function. 'In fact you did not resist at all. ... And you did not refuse' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 163). The officer is not willing to surrender his role, yet Michael K subverts the relationship by not engaging him, and thus undermines the officer's attempts at mastery by not agreeing to be brought into this exchange. Michael K's acts of withholding (which differ from refusing) do not amount to a slave's fight against a master, as this would necessitate a mutual recognition of the roles, an agreement to taking part, even if refused. Rather, Michael K 'prefers not to' enter the relationship: he does not recognise or acknowledge the officer's otherness, nor seek to have his own affirmed.

To understand Michael K's failed mutual recognition, we might briefly turn to Kant, who argued that any subjective experience can be synthesised into an objective construction. For Kant, the world is a construct, which emerges directly from the subject. Of course, Michael K defies this model and persists on the level of the manifold of perceptions, without any unification into a singular, coherent cognition. Michael K seems all body – he is flooded with sensations, overcome with perceptions and the multitude of phenomena, like an autistic mind, unable to prioritise, systematise, or expulse the excess, and ultimately unable to relate to others. Yet precisely this repudiation of any and every type of human exchange, of all personal engagement, enables Michael K to remain outside of the master-slave dynamic, and in a way, to remain free. The officer might insist on what Singh calls 'humanitarian fetishism', but he is unable to sustain it without Michael's acquiescence. Michael K's mode of living is

his perseverance in bare survival, in withdrawing from assent, in withholding recognition, in his extreme vulnerability, even in the face of death.

Indeed, as it dramatizes the ethical (or anethical) stakes of withholding assent and recognition, and of finding in vulnerability and mere survival a power to face death, *Life & Times of Michael K* is also a novel considerably involved in political questions of apartheid and the land. In his 'Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech', Coetzee remarks that:

South African literature is a literature in bondage, as it reveals in even its highest moments, shot through as they are with feelings of homelessness and yearnings for a nameless liberation. It is a less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them (Coetzee, 1992, p. 98).

It should be noted that in South Africa, much of the master-slave relationship of course stemmed not only from racial subjugation, but perhaps more importantly and primarily from the domination of land. And so, symbolically, as Michael K withdraws from the recognition of another's otherness, as he departs from a potentiality of a master-slave dynamic, he also alters his relationship towards the land. As the surface of his body merges with the silences of his speech, as he becomes imperceptible within this inability to speak, and as the mark CM literalizes the silencing of his race, a similar process can be observed with the land. Without claiming ownership, without any attachment to the land itself, Michael K digs a burrow on the veld, and with it, physicalizes his relationship to the land:

But then he thought: I am not building a house out here by the dam to pass onto other generations. What I make ought to be careless, makeshift, a shelter to be abandoned without a tugging at the heartstrings. So that if they ever find this place or its ruins, and shake their heads and say to each other: What shiftless creatures, how little pride they took in their work!, it will not matter (Coetzee, 2004, p. 101).

By articulating his burrow as a temporary accommodation, Michael K might be withdrawing attachment to it, as well as avoiding human connections, but this hole in the earth offers him protection, and, crucially, articulates his relationship to the (non)human. As another embodiment of detached attachment, he is growing his pumpkins and living in the earth self-sufficiently, autonomous from others, separate from the connection to the land or its people. Yet he is still a part of an ecology, a

nonhuman set of entities referred to as ‘a termite’, ‘an ant’, ‘a snail’, ‘a parasite’, and of course, ‘an insect’. At the same time, he is not only living, but more importantly, living on the edge of demise, as a bare being, living as dying; Michael K’s burrow becomes as much a makeshift living space as a makeshift grave. To paraphrase Hegel, the endurance of death is what every subject lives with, as it is only in death that it can maintain its own being. Therefore, in Michael K, the desires for life and death exist as coterminous, and he manifests this more acutely than other humans, with death being intensely in the forefront, on the surface. ‘It seemed foolish to argue with someone who looked at you as if from beyond the grave’ (Coetzee, 2004, p. 148). The palatable presence of death in his life and their interplay are further actualised in his care for the land: he uses his mother’s ashes to fertilise the soil in which he plants the seeds; he nurtures the seedlings and later the pumpkins like his children; he is barely alive, starving, surviving on the edge of death by maintaining the garden, by keeping the earth alive. In this way, death epitomises the incorporeal condition to his survival, with the visceral endurance of bare life quietly weaving itself through them both.

Yet the garden is grown on the land of the masters, and as such, this land is the symbolic placeholder of white colonial ownership, which simultaneously feeds Michael K and remains the site of his detached attachment. As Michael Marais argues, ‘[t]he description of K’s second visit to the Karoo farm should suggest this character’s respect for the openness of the land, his refusal or inability to foreclose on and thereby control it by viewing it as property, as a ‘farm’’ (Marais, 2001, p. 111). As such, his detached attachment to the veld emphasizes, in a comparable manner, his relationships in general to humans, nonhuman entities, and the land itself as one independent of (the recognition of) others. And with this, he opens himself to new possibilities for vulnerability, those of a liminal body, those of one who is living as dying: ‘He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie a string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live’ (Coetzee, 2004, p. 184). The novel started with Anna K feeding her son who has a cleft palate with a spoon, and it ends with Michael K sustaining his life in a similar way. This Beckettian back-loop of beginnings and endings foregrounds a framework for *Life & Times of Michael K*, while Coetzee’s depiction of his life on the veld demonstrates the manner in which Michael K perseveres in his bare survival of

detached attachment from the land, from other people, and ultimately from himself: 'He could feel the process of his body slowing down. You are forgetting to breathe, he would say to himself, and yet lie without breathing. He raised a hand heavy as lead and put it over his heart: far away, as if in another country, he felt a languid stretching and closing' (Coetzee, 2004, p. 118). In what Roberto Esposito (2008) describes as the 'non-personal inscribed in a person', Michael K is one without an other, a persevering *conatus*, escaping acknowledgement or validation, refusing to be a subject, delineating an anethics of endurance, which is predicated on the physical fortitude to withhold assent, and with this, to continue.

4. *Life Writing, the Death Drive and the Desire to Live in Age of Iron.*

'To embrace death as my own, mine alone. To whom this writing then? The answer: to you but not you; to me; to you in me' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 6).

In *Age of Iron*, Coetzee's sixth novel, questions of isolation and survival, of enduring pain, but also of empathy and attachment to others, again come to the fore. The novel begins with a juxtaposition of terror and tenderness; we meet Elizabeth Curren, who, upon receiving a diagnosis of terminal cancer, is struck by a current of yearning for her daughter. Entering the house, she is a mother, wishing for her daughter's touch, longing for human connection and attachment. 'We bear children in order to be mothered by them' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 5). With her daughter away, Curren chooses to chronicle the journey of facing the ultimate hollowness in a letter, which will be read after her death. In this way, her writing is to become her final contemplative home, her endowment to her daughter in a form of a written reflection, the philosophical, meditative inheritance to be left behind. But it is also a way of living on in her daughter and passing her own life to her, and as a double security contract, it is a prolonged existence which becomes possible through this written testament of dying: 'These words, as you read them, if you read them, enter you and draw breath again. They are, if you like, my way of living on. Once upon a time you lived in me as once upon a time I lived in my mother; as she still lives in me, as I grow toward her, may I live in you' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 131). Coetzee, in this way, inverts the maternal relationship in which the mother sustains the child's survival in utero, as well as re-examines the relationship of the dependence of one

human being upon an other. Here, a dying mother survives or is sustained in the ongoing life of her child, or, in a more abstract sense, Elizabeth Curren's individuality will die, but she will live on in the otherness of her daughter.

Writing is the intermediary for this inversion, which is only ever imaginary for Curren. As such, Coetzee shows writing to open a specific mode of perseverance, one which does not exhaust its strength nor deplete itself of its power. 'I have written about blood before, I know. I have written about everything, I am written out, bled dry, and still I go on' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 137). Writing offers a Beckettian blueprint for immortality, of sorts, for even as the writing ends, the words endure: 'Death may indeed be the last great foe of writing, but writing is also the foe of death. Therefore, writing, holding death at arm's length' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 115). And more specifically, Curren is using writing *about* dying as the theme of her writing, which, as a process, is intended to keep death away. As in *In the Heart of the Country*, Coetzee is again using the interplay of presence and distance, attachment, and estrangement, lack and expansion as means of approaching the complexities of one's existence. In this regard, it is the narrated subjectivity which survives and remains, rather than the writer; in the context in which Coetzee himself is striving to persevere, it is this writing itself which, ultimately, 'writes' Coetzee, too. As Elleke Boehmer holds, 'truth becomes a product of story. Indeed, as Coetzee has shown in novel after novel, from *Foe* to *Age of Iron*, from *Michael K* to *Slow Man*, it is where we are most fictional, most given to producing fibs, fakes and forgeries, that we can most fully explore and expose the truths of the self' (Boehmer, 2016, p. 447). Writing, as such, is always both self-writing, self-creation, and self-erasure.

The process of constructing one's 'self' through writing is something Coetzee addresses recurrently in his works, most evidently in his autobiographical, ficto-biographical (or *autre*-biographical) novels *Boyhood*, *Youth* and *Summertime*, but also here, in fictional novels. In a written interview with David Atwell, Coetzee states that 'everything that you write, including criticism and fiction, writes you as you write it' (Coetzee, 1992, p. 17). Similarly, in his only authorised biography to date (Kannemeyer, 2012), Coetzee claims that everything written is always autobiographical, as much as all autobiographies exist only as written stories. Tim Parks, in his joint review of Atwell's book as well as of Coetzee's *The Good Story*, goes even further: 'Coetzee does not do autobiography but, looked at another way, he doesn't do anything

but' (Parks, 2016, p. 28). Yet as Coetzee explains in *The Good Story*, the reality of one's experience is always self-created, despite his belief in the notion of the self being fixed and beyond one's control; therefore, he uses this constructed reality, and then writes and rewrites it. In this sense, for Coetzee 'subjectivity is not only an effect of language, as Derrida, De Man, and others have contended, but also, more specifically, a function of narrative, or a narrative product' (Boehmer, 2016, p. 438). In a similar manner, Coetzee is usually disinclined to settle on a central, predominant narrative, but is rather unceasingly unsettling the narratives of his own novels. Max Saunders, in his book on life-writing (2010), interprets Coetzee's use of orthonyms as disruptive, since they obfuscate the subject, thus his use of self-naming rather 'represents the story of autobiography as failure to tell its story' (Saunders, 2010, p. 143). Since storytelling as a process interests Coetzee much more than the stories themselves, beginning with his first novel, *Dusklands*, he starts writing out what appears to be a constant preoccupation with his own self, by referencing his own name, in a fictional or meta-fictional way, with always curated and highly censored segments of his biography, while simultaneously removing the evidence and covering all the traces. He is charting the movements of writing, and how they shape his subjectivity. Atwell thus suggests that 'impersonality is not what it seems. It is not a simple repudiation of itself in the name of art; on the contrary, it involves an instantiation of self, followed by an erasure that leaves traces of the self behind' (Atwell, 2015, p. 27). Writing, as such, is irreducible to the creation of a self or personhood, while the writer himself becomes depersonalized.

Yet if writing itself is in the end public, death is private for Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron*. Writing, to be sure, might serve as a form of endurance, and as such her letter is given to myriad addressees and manifold interpretations. But death, contrastingly, is personal, and, to borrow Heidegger's language, death is what is uniquely and authentically our own. For Curren, similarly, embracing her death as her own is her central task: 'To embrace death on my own, mine alone' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 6). The inevitability of death forces every human being into an unattainable and impenetrable mental and emotional state of inaccessibility. Nevertheless, Curren repeatedly reminds herself to endure the process of dying as a *form of life*, not as the *end of life*; in yet another Beckettian formulation: 'There is not only death inside me. There is life too. The death is strong, the life is weak. But my duty is to the life. I must keep it alive. I must' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 145). As such, the process of dying substantiates living as the

incorporeal condition for the corporeal, and it is itself an attenuated testament of life in the form of bare survival. Therefore, being faced with death, one becomes acutely aware and conscious of life in its most stripped-down form. It is in her extreme, albeit chosen solitude that Curren questions what it means to live during the experience of dying. Her Stoicism is reflected in her complete self-awareness and an unwavering acceptance of her predicament, what Nietzsche would call *amor fati*, loving one's fate; she perseveres embracing the unavoidability of the outcome. Thus, living means not only accepting the inevitability of dying, but thoroughly embodying it, it means to live only as dying, through dying, whilst dying. This, in fact, is exactly how she perseveres, by affirming life in dying and by producing a written testament of her final days. 'What will you do with yourself when I am gone? I will go on' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 188). This relentless tenacity of mere being becomes the double process of her life-writing, and of her dying.

Coetzee considers another modality of detached attachment as he chronicles Curren's relationship with her new neighbour, the homeless man staying on the street just outside of her house, who becomes her only companion on her path towards death. Without compassion or empathy, he accompanies her when there is no one else by her side. He is detached and she does not trust him, and it is precisely *because* she does not that she asks him to post the letter to her daughter. 'Because I cannot trust Vercueil, I must trust him' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 130). She examines attachment to someone who is profoundly detached, and she seeks to be cared by him who is ultimately incapable of caring. 'Care: the true root of charity. I look for him to care, and he does not. Because he is beyond caring. Beyond caring and beyond care' (Coetzee, 1990, p. 22). In this complex dynamic, care (or charity/caritas) loses its specular aspect or is shown to fail; care is no longer about the mutual recognition of carer and subject of care; ironically, he cares for her by not caring, he remains detached through the attachment on the surface, within minimal distance of separation; attachment becomes rendered as a mutual detachment, and charity as pitiless and untrustworthy. By withholding assent to both charity and compassion, Vercueil is able to resist the lure of alterity in a similar way to Michael K's withdrawal from relationships of dependent reciprocity.

In this way, through detached attachment, Coetzee's characters negotiate the extreme situations that demand their perseverance with others and within their worlds. Judith Butler explains singular-commonality as the root of what it means to persevere:

‘For it turns out that to persevere in one’s own being means that one cannot persevere in that being understood radically singular and set apart from common life’ (Butler, 2015, p. 66). And regarding the perennial pursuit of survival, there is no ontological or even epistemological disparity between the human form and other modes of the *conatus*. Michael K becomes ‘like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand. A hard little stone, barely aware of its surroundings, enveloped in itself and its interior life’ (Coetzee, 2004, p. 135). Or, observing himself from a distance, ‘he thought of himself not as something heavy that left tracks behind him, but if anything as a speck upon a surface of an earth too deeply asleep to notice the scratch of ant-feet, the rasp of butterfly teeth, the tumbling of dust’ (Coetzee, 2004, p. 97). The processes of the human interacting with the non-human, the individual with the common, and the personal with the collective, are always ongoing, and we can read Curren’s singular-common desire to persevere along these lines. She is ‘alone together’ with Vercueil: ‘I am here in my room in the night but I am also with him, all the time, as I am with you across the seas, hovering’ (Coetzee, 1990, p. 176). This serves to further foreground the all-embracing interconnectedness of all beings, human and non-human alike in collaborative acts that function as *topoi* of ethical encounters. The detached attachment allows this surface ethics to reveal the vulnerability of the bodies in separation from one another, through an attachment that maintains their independence without appropriation, and allows the expression of their singular, particular, authentic existence. And the death drive as a forceful mode of living serves as a potentiality that propels bare life into an interminable endurance, and as the incorporeal prerequisite for all that exists.

5. *Detached Attachment and Prosthesis of Mastery in Slow Man.*

‘In the larger perspective, losing a leg is no more than a rehearsal for losing everything’ (Coetzee, 2006, p. 15).

Coetzee’s *Slow Man* further examines an anethics of detached attachment in a series of attempted and ultimately failed human relationships which offer a depiction of the

perennial struggles with the master (or a puzzling lack of a master). There are people coming into Paul Rayment's life, strangers who compel him to try and build close human relationships, but they prove to be strangers who expose not only the impossibility of mutual recognition, the absence of mastery of his own life, but furthermore challenge the existence of a master. As with *Age of Iron* and *Diary of a Bad Year*, *Slow Man* again brings into light the question of the origin and the role of language, and the question which Beckett persistently and continuously asked in *The Unnamable*: where is language coming from? In a comparable manner, Coetzee poses this question in a way that is bound up in the relation of writing, ethics, life, and death.

In a few brief seconds of flying through the air, as he is hit by a young driver and thrown from his bicycle onto the road, Paul Rayment's life transforms in the most profound ways. His separation from the bike brings a disengagement from the life he has always known, the life he thought of as stable. 'It takes the loss of a leg to make our protagonists realise that, in fact, they were already unsteady' (Woessner, 2010, p. 225). Coetzee's writing style slows down as it describes the painfully stretched out moments of the accident, where time enters a new dimension, one in which, even while flying through the air, there is a sense of stillness, with all the sounds muted and a strange calmness hovering over Rayment. Thus, slowness is introduced into the novel on the level of form, as well as narrative, and we are invited to approach reading in a similar manner. The main character, in a time of radical ontological vulnerability, thus embodies this slowness as his fall physicalizes the deceleration of his body.

Made vulnerable and deprived of his autonomy by the amputation that follows the accident, Rayment becomes destitute and dependent on assistance. Despite his best efforts, 'the gloom does not lift. The gloom seems to have settled in, to be part of the climate' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 25). The accident shifts his life into a previously unknown gear, one of not only slowness, but almost complete immobility, and with his physical deceleration comes a new mental dwelling in formerly unvisited spaces; the state of his body now merges with the state of his mind. Yet he refuses a prosthesis and chooses to remain dependent on others. 'Let me say it again: *I don't want a prosthesis*' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 10). Paul Rayment persists in his refusal and wishes instead to live with the absence of his leg, rather than with a prosthetic one. Here, the lack of prosthesis serves as another example of the incorporeal, subsisting, rather than actually existing, while serving as a condition to the body; in this way, Rayment's body exists *because* of the

lack of leg, and precisely *as* lacking the leg. The accident, for Rayment, thus rearranges the question of subjectivity while disclosing the primary conditions of bare survival, such that the question of ethics, of how to live, becomes an examination of the prerequisites of mere life. When his body is rendered minimal by the pain of amputation, his subjectivity is reassembled on the premise of *the lack of the leg* as the incorporeal, on the endurance of this lack, on reintegration *with* it, not despite its absence.

'How is your leg?'

'My leg? My leg is fine.'

A stupid question and a stupid answer. How can his leg be fine? There is no leg. The leg in question was long ago hacked off and incinerated. *How is the absence of your leg?*: that is what she ought to be asking. *The absence of my leg is not fine, if you want the truth. The absence of my leg has left a hole in my life* (Coetzee, 2006, p. 183).

This endured and enduring absence now becomes a cornerstone of his existence, as it consolidates itself around the lack (or the incorporeal), the missing limb not as a missing link, but as the one that lays bare the conditions of life itself. And despite the fact that no one else can participate in the solitariness of our mere survival, it is common to us all: 'I am not the *we* of anyone' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 193). We are all singularly alone in the bareness of our being, as it connects us in our difference, while simultaneously keeping us separate and autonomous in our individuality. Rayment's choice to intentionally endure the lack of his leg is an ethical decision to endure the bareness of his being, to consciously select detached attachment as an ethical position. Withdrawing from others, he also tries to distance himself from his body and from the pain: '*Pain is nothing*, he tells himself, *just a warning signal from the body to the brain. Pain is no more real than an X-ray photograph is the real thing*. But of course he is wrong' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 12). The reality of the pain exists in its affects, and he is ultimately unable to create a distance from both the pain and the body itself. Because the body, if we agree with Judith Butler, is never just an autonomous materiality, but always exists within a discourse, which opens the possibility of ethical encounters as microphysics of bodies, with the body becoming the *topos* of these encounters (while the corporeal is conditioned by the incorporeal, or, for Rayment, his body by the missing part of it).

Slow Man offers several exercises in these ethical collaborative acts, not only with the relationships within the body, but also with other people. The appearance of the writer Elizabeth Costello marks a significant shift in Rayment's life after the accident, to one of passivity, inertia, of loss of authority, if not victimhood; although reluctantly and resentfully, Rayment gives away his autonomy to Costello, who herself has surrendered to an unknown authority, an undisclosed master. 'You came to me,' she says. 'In certain respects I am not in command of what comes to me' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 81). A stranger precipitating change, a character we meet in other Coetzee's works, she is also an uninvited guest, in possession of the knowledge about Rayment's life that even he doesn't hold, and it soon becomes evident that she is in fact the one who is writing *Slow Man*. In this unusual twist of events, Rayment forfeits the mastery of his own life and yields to Costello, who herself is subjected to an unknown external power; this, it appears, is becoming a tale of surrendering one's own mastery to an unidentified master. But as Magda discovered, as long as we remain in the dialectic of the master and the slave, there is no final resolution as the positions are always shifting; the only way out is through the unequivocal withdrawal from the dynamic of mutual affirmation, and from ontological dependence on another.

The relationship with Rayment's Croatian caregiver and nurse Marijana provides another rendering of the ethical practice of survival, as it negotiates the processes of self-preservation, self-creation, and self-erasure with those of other people. Initially intrigued by her foreignness, impressed by her dedication to caregiving, and attracted to her difference, Rayment becomes quickly attached, and as this striking passage reveals, dependent:

We should shake ourselves up more often. We should also brace ourselves and take a long look in the mirror, even if we dislike what we see there. I am not referring to the creature trapped behind glass whose stare we are normally so careful to avoid. *Behold this being who eats with me, spends nights with me, says 'I' on my behalf!* If you find me labile, Marijana, it is not just because I suffered a knock. It is because every now and then the stranger who says 'I' breaks through the glass and speaks in me. Through me. Speaks tonight. Speaks now. Speaks love (Coetzee, 2006, p. 210).

In the midst of his intimate examination of his self, an other emerges from out of the looking glass who breaks up, or breaks into the scene of his specular selfhood. If we suppose there is no 'true self' behind the glass (or perhaps behind Lacan's mirror), then who is this 'I' that Paul Rayment is speaking of? It is as if he wants Marijana to become

a prosthetic 'I' for him that speaks 'in' him or 'through' him. '*Prothese*: she pronounces it as if it were a German word. Thesis, antithesis, then prosthesis' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 62). But there is no prosthesis as synthesis which, in true Hegelian spirit, could reconcile the physical absence of the leg and the aforementioned hole in his life, or bring them together in harmony to settle outstanding differences. There can be no synthesis, his absence (of a leg) cannot be closed, Rayment has rejected the prosthesis; but then he turns to Marijana as a supplemental 'I', as a placeholder for the missing leg, for the hole in his life. As Michael K's silences are physicalized in his cleft palate, and his forgoing of mutual recognition marks his starving body as he rejects both food and charity, here, Rayment's missing leg and his refusal of a prosthesis is physicalized in the voice of Marijana, speaking in him as a presence-absence, or as the incorporeal. And although she ultimately declines the invitation for this role, this does not, however, imply that Marijana and Paul enter a fixed relation of two discrete subjectivities that seek mutual recognition: Coetzee repeatedly reiterates the inadequacies of this approach. As in the many failed encounters in his other novels, in *Slow Man*, it becomes evident that the reciprocal appropriation of an other's otherness not only repeatedly and consistently malfunctions, but also that it offers an unstable relationship that undoes the dialectic of self and other. The argument here is that Coetzee, through his failed encounters, rather dramatizes a different kind of ethics that remains within encounters – one of energies, acts, forces, and bodies –, and does not presume a fixed, predetermined subjectivity. Indeed, this kind of ethics does not infer that the self is dependent on an other at all; the self is departicularised, rather than realized, broken by its encounters with otherness, rather than formed by passing through the *via negativa* of alterity.

For Coetzee, this modality of ethics takes language as one of the forces that assists in the undoing of any pre-constructed individuality or fixed subjectivity. Always changing and forever becoming, language serves as a pertinent example of a collaborative act, in which various elements all play a role in what is to become anew; language grows into itself through these different interactions, it develops through the manifolds of iterations, the multiplicities of interlaced factors, including words, silences, gaps, and failed utterances. This is of course assiduously examined in the works of Beckett, but many of Coetzee's characters (Elizabeth Curren, Elizabeth Costello, David Lurie, Señor C, all the Coetzee avatars from *Boyhood*, *Summertime* and *Youth*, and of course Michael K) also find their bodies riven by words and silences. Paul

Rayment, specifically, struggles with self-expression and seeks the 'I' as an other to speak in and through him. Elsewhere in the novel, he attributes this to the foreignness of the English language, with French being his maternal language and his early background. Thus, his mode of speaking English is one of detachment, of a presupposed gap between his authentic being and the articulation, and he is using English as a type of prosthesis, one which serves as a physical presence of an absence. For him, English is a mask, a prosthetic face, or a prosthetic tongue. Further notable is the fact that Marijana, the person he chooses as his prosthetic 'I', is herself a foreigner, indeed, one for whom English presents an even greater challenge.⁴⁹ The English language thus physicalizes the absence of his first language, and Marijana, with her limited English, physicalizes the absence of his authentic 'I' as he wants her to become its prosthesis. Furthermore, Marijana's and Rayment's bodies serve as *topoi* of ethical encounters, articulated in collaborative acts which only serve to obfuscate the boundaries between the one and the other. In sum, then, the anethics in *Slow Man* is developed through a series of embodied engagements, with language being one of these engagements. 'It is not I who speak the language, it is the language that is spoken through me. It does not come from my core, *mon coeur*. He hesitates, checks himself. *I am hollow at the core*, he was about to say – *as I am sure you can hear*' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 197). It is this hollow core that Lacan would suggest we all speak from; for the Stoics, this is the incorporeal as the necessary condition to the material. And we can find it embodied in the lack of a home for Rayment, in Magda's emptiness in *From the Heart of the Country*, and of course, it is in *the lack of the leg*, and the absence of a prosthesis that Rayment's life is now structured around.

Trying to find the true home of one's language, we discover that what ultimately endures is the language as such, which is unfolding in speaking and in writing, and which is invariably evolving and constantly becoming something different and new. A speaker or a writer, in such manner, performs as a residence for the process of speaking and writing, as a temporary custodian for the emerging and expanding process of language, which operates from this domicile, yet is not formed, affected, or limited by it. Instead, language arises from it in a non-attached form, with a *conatus* of its own.

⁴⁹ 'She speaks a rapid, approximate Australian English with Slavic liquids and an uncertain command of *a* and *the*, coloured by the slang she must pick up from her children, who must pick it up from their classmates. It is a variety of the language he is not familiar with; he rather likes it' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 27).

‘He closes his eyes, empties his mind, waits for the words to come’ (Coetzee, 2006, p. 232). What endures, in the end, is writing itself as a mode of perseverance, as a Beckettian blueprint for immortality, which is constantly writing, rewriting and erasing itself.

6. *Enduring Companionship in Diary of a Bad Year.*

‘The story of Eurydice has been misunderstood’ (Coetzee, 2008, p. 159).

Decades after his first novels, in *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee continues his incisive inquiries into perseverance, even if its modes of expression change, and new, striving characters are introduced, created and then often re-written. What is more, Coetzee further explores the tangled set of relations among endurance, death, and (self-)writing which crisscross his work, a set of relations which at once traverse boundaries between the personal and the impersonal, the self and the other, creation and change, as well as survival and death themselves. Endurance in life, death and (self-)writing, taken together, not only lend his work its affective resonances, but also posit his work as performing the philosophical problems it sets for itself, even if irresolutely.

In *Diary of a Bad Year*, we encounter another person of letters, and yet another Coetzee avatar: Señor C, as his Filipino secretary refers to him, or JC, as he signs his notes. He joins Eugene Dawn in *Dusklands*, Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*, Elizabeth Curren in *Age of Iron*, Elizabeth Costello, and David Lurie in *Disgrace*, as the most prominent Coetzee characters who, in varying ways, utilise a method of embodying, expanding, articulating, and often eschewing their thoughts and emotions about survival and death through writing. As an ethical task, a mode of creation and living, writing is never effortless or painless, yet for them, it is both the only possible path and, simultaneously, an impossible path, one of constant insufficiency, of inadequacy, if not failure. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, Señor C diagrams this insufficiency down to the level of the relationship between the language uttered and his sense of interior intention. There, he questions a phenomenological account of interiority

predicated on a willed and adequate act of utterance, positing instead a temporal and semiological mismatch between what is uttered and what was meant to have been said:

Is it ever good enough, as a phenomenological account, to say that somewhere deep inside I knew what I wanted to say, after which I searched out the appropriate verbal tokens and moved them around until I had succeeded in saying what I wanted to say? Would it not be more accurate to say that I fiddle with a sentence until the words on the page ‘sound’ or ‘are’ right, and then stop fiddling, and to say to myself, ‘That must be what you wanted to say?’ If so, who is it who judges what sounds or does not sound right? Is it necessarily I (‘I’) (Coetzee, 2008, p. 196)?

The ‘I’ rather arises retrospectively, belatedly after the utterance, as if to affirm a matching of meaning and intention as necessary and not contingent ‘fiddling’. For Coetzee, bringing thinking into words is an endless pursuit of capturing something in its fugitivity. Thoughts, in this way, are construed as having a vitality of their own, a specific mode of persevering in their being, and an inherent resistance. Thoughts which might be put into words thus have their own impersonal lives, which writers attempt to bring into the material form of written words. Yet as such, impersonal thoughts risk becoming suspended in the throes of actualisation, or fall short of being claimed, *a posteriori*, by an ‘I’. For Señor C, the difficulty is to let the impersonal life of thoughts actualize into words as saying what he would have wanted to say: Is it necessarily ‘I’? And for Coetzee more generally: ‘to write a novel you have to be like Atlas, holding up a whole world on your shoulders and supporting it there for months and years while its affairs work themselves out’ (Coetzee, 2008, p. 54). But Coetzee goes farther to think about a unified ‘I’ not only as a retrospective fiction of wholeness in regards to what one would have liked to have said, but also in terms of the way that human language serves at once to both unify and dissociate the body. For it is not only that the ‘I’ consolidates intention and interiority retrospectively, but that it also either introduces a non-material ideal ‘entity’ (or ego) that posits an ideal corporeal integrity (this is my body), or, at the same time, can comment on its own parts (my leg hurts) as if it possessed them as separate. To show this, he highlights how a human-all-too-human ‘I’ dissociates the material and the nonmaterial in a way that animals do not:

We speak of *the dog with the sore foot* or *the bird with the broken wing*. But the dog does not think of itself in those terms, or the bird. To the dog, when it tries to walk, there is simply *I am pain*, to the bird, when it launches itself into flight, simply *I cannot*.
With us it seems to be different. The fact that such common locutions as ‘my leg’, ‘my eye’, ‘my brain’, and even ‘my body’ exist suggests that we believe there is

some non-material, perhaps fictive, entity that stands in the relation of possessor to possessed to the body's 'parts' and even to the whole body. Or else the existence of such locutions shows that language cannot get purchase, cannot get going, until it has split up the unity of experience (Coetzee, 2008, p. 59).

Unlike the animal whose experience of pain is not dissociated from the physical experience of pain by an intervening locution, human language has simultaneously a unifying and dis-unifying power: it both can say 'I' am a whole, and this is my leg, eye, etc. Language then both posits the fiction of subjective autonomy or individuality, of what exists and of its incorporeal conditioning, and at the same time it dissects bodies and experiences. It is out of this tension that language can 'get going'. Now, in *Diary of a Bad Year*, such philosophical concerns about language, bodies and experience do not merely appear as philosophical issues in themselves but are tied to the question of the relationship between life, death and writing. They do so, I would like to argue here, in terms of a complex exploration of ontologies of attachment and detachment, life and death instincts, the corporeal and the incorporeal, and of ambiguous acts of writing, made dynamic in Coetzee's representation of Señor C's liminal and isolated subjectivity and his 'self'-recording of it.

At first blush, as we saw in terms of *Age of Iron*, in *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee again reflects on the intense solitariness of death, here tightly interlacing it with writing. After Curren decides to brave the process of dying on her own, she nonetheless risks connecting with a stranger; here, similarly, Señor C, also a sworn recluse, is hesitant to step outside of his self-imposed seclusion, but then finds Anya, his Filipino secretary, who becomes his companion on the way to death. Like Verceuil, Anya becomes an arbiter in detached attachment, mediated through an estranged process of self-writing. She becomes amanuensis, soon lending her typing fingers to his thoughts which strive to be put into words: with his eyesight impaired, she records his ideas into a voice recorder, and she transcribes them for him in such manner that we end up questioning who is performing the 'writing'. As if this were insufficient, she also endorses his sexual ardour, and in due time becomes the object of his dreams of death:

Last night I had a dream, which I afterwards wrote down, about dying and being guided to the gateway to oblivion by a young woman. What I did not record is the question that occurred to me in the act of writing: *Is she the one?* This young woman who declines to call me by my name, instead calling me *Señor*, perhaps *Senior* - is she the one who has been assigned to conduct me to my death? If that is so, how odd a messenger, and how unsuitable! Yet perhaps it is the nature of

death that everything about it, every last thing, should strike us as unsuitable (Coetzee, 2008, p. 59, 60, 61).

Anya both enables him to live and escorts him to his death. She is the diarist of his death dreams, even as she does not call him by his name. She is at once a messenger, like an angel of death, but one that seems unsuitable to convey the message, an incongruous failure in relegation, and as a companion on the way to death, like Verceuil, not a predictable or a fitting one. Yet her very unsuitability 'suits', for Señor C, the unsuitability of death itself. Failure has the capability of reshuffling the positions of power and powerlessness, as Beckett and Kristof so strikingly revealed. What makes Anya suitable to the solitariness of dying is her way of embodying an attachment that haunts detachment, an aloneness of being together with someone as we die. These form a piece, or rhyme, with an 'I' and a language that both unify and dis-unify, the aloneness of intimacy, with ourselves and others. The materialization of thoughts as words, and the power of a locution to both unify and dissect the body, that is, forms an analogue with a mode of detached being with others brought out in the process of dying.

For both Curren and Señor C, then, the interweaving of the self and the other becomes radically examined in the final stages of their lives, when in dying they are drawn towards fellow humans, yet are also intensely on their own. As the fact of their detachment intensifies, they nevertheless attempt to attach themselves to others, as if the struggle of life and death were to become too burdensome to endure. They reach for an empathetic hand, or seek to believe in a love that keeps one from being torn away:

One holds on to the belief that someone, somewhere, loves one enough to hold on to one, keep one from being torn away. But the belief is false. All love is moderate, in the end. No one will come with one. The story of Eurydice has been misunderstood. What the story is about is the solitariness of death. The story of Eurydice reminds us that as of the moment of death we lose all power to elect our companions (Coetzee, 2008, p. 159).

Here, and elsewhere for Coetzee, death exposes not so much our ability to elect our companions, but rather the fact that we are radically disempowered to choose them; we face death among unelected companions, and this, in fact, is the truth of the story of Eurydice. On the one hand, we could read this as a tension between what Heidegger would call the 'ownmost' (*eigentlich*) quality of Dasein as being-towards-death, namely that our death, in its singularity, can only ever be our own: '[n]o one will come with

one', yet, at the same time, there is a collectiveness of our conative striving to persevere in our being. Reading Heidegger's figure of *Mit-sein* (being-with) as ontologically prior to *Dasein*, Jean-Luc Nancy thus speaks of us as beings 'singular-plural': as we face death, our singular-plurality is accentuated. We are alone among our unelected companions, as community of detached, liminal subjects of endurance. On the other hand, we could set next to Heidegger and Nancy Freud's doubled figures of the death instinct and life instinct. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961), Freud declares death to be the irrevocable telos of human existence, yet one wrought through a relentless *agon* of life and the death instincts. The two travel together, propelling each other forward, oftentimes parallel to one another, yet frequently against each other, while never truly apart. The life instinct exhibits its strength in indomitable acts of survival and preservation of life, in pleasure, affection, avoidance of pain, as well as in social correlation, while the death instinct displays its powers through aggression (directed inwards towards oneself or outwards against others) or in the reliving and repeating of trauma. The interaction between these two principles ultimately constitutes our lives.

Although Coetzee does not invoke Freud or Heidegger directly, we often find his singular-plural characters deep in this struggle between life and death, as the perseverance of the impersonal life overtakes them and empowers them to endure. It enables Elizabeth Curren to continue in the face of death, despite death, it allows Señor C to let go of Anya and proceed on his own, and which ultimately permits him to survive as dying. Furthermore, the struggle between life and death can only truly be sustained within and through such detached-attached relationships with others. Anya promises Señor C: 'I will fly to Sydney. I will do that. I will hold his hand. I can't go with you, I will say to him, it is against the rules. I can't go with you but what I will do is hold your hand as far as the gate' (Coetzee, 2008, p. 226). Or likewise, Elizabeth Costello asks Paul Rayment in *Slow Man*: 'And am I the shade assigned to welcome you to the afterlife – is that what you are asking?' (Coetzee, 2006, p. 233). As such, the *I* that self-divides is always already a singular-plural *we*, and the unattainable desire to preserve this attachment-detachment and solitary-togetherness continues all the way to death itself. 'Good night, Señor C, I will whisper in his ear: sweet dreams, and flights of angels, and all the rest' (Coetzee, 2008, p. 227).

As a persevering modality of ethics, writing thus inhabits the space of detached attachment to the self and to others, to the human and the non-human, by means of corporeal surfaces predicated by the subsisting incorporeal conditions, with bodies equipped with the critical powers of the minds, forming new types of in-corporated subjectivities. ‘Behind every paragraph the reader ought to be able to hear the music of present joy and future grief’ (Coetzee, 2008, p. 167). These active, re-active and inter-active subjects operate as persevering vectors of an ethics of endurance and can be traced through different modalities of encounters that I have pursued in this chapter. For Coetzee, these have included detached attachment, and dying as a form of living, apart from the aforementioned writing as a form of endurance. These modes of existence interrogate, challenge, and ultimately dissolve all forms of mastery; by withholding assent to domination, an open relationship of detached attachment is created, and within it, an expansion without mutual appropriation, but instead with vulnerable, emphatic, indiscernible and departicularised embodied subjects.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the question of endurance in the writing of Samuel Beckett, Agota Kristof, and J.M. Coetzee. It has proposed a philosophical vision of the literary expression of endurance, organized around the key, interrelated concepts of anethics, withholding assent, detached attachment, self-preservation, perseverance, the corporeal and the incorporeal, the continuum of writing and living, and writing that is at once a form of self-creation and self-erasure. In their interrelationships, these concepts have shaped a unique understanding of ethics of endurance, one which I have named ‘anethics’, and which has established the grounds for reading Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee as sharing a similar ethical sensibility and political worldview. The evolution of this triologue has enabled a creation of a new philosophical and ethical vocabulary which has served as an apparatus for further clarification and expansion of the key topics that bring the three authors together: namely bodies and endurance, the roles of language and writing, pain and trauma, life and death, drive and maxim, bareness of being, as well as its perseverance in extreme circumstances.

These concepts have foregrounded a way of thinking ethics as fundamentally corporeal, embodied, and not bound by categorical imperatives, teleologies of virtue, deontology, or mutual recognition. It has commenced with the postulate that everything capable of activity is a body, such that any subjectivity with a power to affect another subjectivity is also a body. This expanded definition of bodies includes energies, forces, states, qualities, emotions, ideas, voices, things, and animals, among others. Defined this way, bodies are not objects or things, as common language might suggest, but rather processes of encounter. While they meet and interact with others, they affect them and allow themselves to be affected by them; these open exchanges produce forms, movements, and shifts into new becomings. This movement of bodies in relation to other bodies produces an abundance of singular compositions, with each new composition finding its own formation, while further interacting with others. I have traced instances of these interactions as they are detailed in characters of Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee that often enter into seemingly destructive encounters with other humans, animals, affects, spaces, silences, and with physical impairment or inability to utter. Their characters depict the scope and the complexity of these interactions, which not only demand a commitment to relentless perseverance, but also a fidelity to the

ongoing transformation of their selves, as well as the relationships they experience, even when they involve self-negation, self-erasure, or death.

Yet what has emerged in this predominantly corporeal reality (where almost everything is a body) is an attendant incorporeality which acts as a precondition to the corporeal, and which I have examined in more detail in the first chapter of the dissertation. Thus, the endurance of bodies depends on the non-bodily, and the material on the realm which subsists (but does not exist), without ever entering the domain of being. In this way, all material engagements become contingent on their immaterial conditions such that there exists an inter-connection of different modes of corporeality which are all inter-related with the incorporeal. In the works of Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee, the most significant examples of the ‘incorporeals’ are the *lekta*, or the ‘sayables’, which enable utterance without themselves being said. The *lekta* create a format, or a schematic framework for language, yet themselves never become articulated; they mark the changes of state and expression which are not materialised in the language, although they shape enunciation. They provide a scaffolding for utterability but remain unsaid.

To further develop how the corporeal relates to the incorporeal, I have demonstrated that the three authors, while not themselves philosophers of ethics, use their writing to dramatize ethical relationships, depicting dispositions of characters to the events of encounters. To establish the theoretical foundation for this, I have drawn on the philosophical/ethical tradition of materialism from the Stoics, Spinoza, Foucault and Deleuze, but also from the post-Deleuzian feminist and materialist theories of Grosz, Butler and Sharp. This philosophical scaffolding enabled me to hold a space for a multitude of singularities in their autonomy as well as in their difference, as I have described with the term ‘withholding assent’. Together with detached attachment, the concept of withholding assent recognises engagements between various bodies, forces, acts, and energies as dynamic and always changing, but also as open and creative. This is unattainable if relationships are interpreted in terms of the reciprocity of mutual recognition as an ontological dependence or mastery of one over the other; instead, they must be viewed as gestures of an emancipatory production and transformation.

In this way, subjectivity emerges in a choreography of encounters and transformations, of bodies affecting and being affected by each other, via mutual

becomings and shifting attachments to an affirmative otherness. I have read this type of subjectivity as always *in* the process of creation, changing while being composed, independent while being inter-connected. Without being fixed or identical to itself, the subjectivity has thus become a form, while the body has served as its vehicle. Hence, the corporeal has acted as an instrument of the potentiality for change, influence, and creation, as a force displayed in the exchanges and interactions of the fictional characters. At the brink of erasure, amidst the trauma of war, and at the threshold of death, Beckett's, Kristof's and Coetzee's characters (as a series of conceptual personae) have probed the limits of subjective ethical life and point to a version of ethics wherein mere survival was at stake; I have named this version anethics of endurance (with the term 'anethics' loosely following the definition of Shane Weller). I have defined anethics of endurance not as the opposite of ethics, but as a limit-case of ethical life, one that could be said to shape any ethical encounter *per se*, and I have traced this anethics of endurance in figures such as Beckett's Molloy, Malone, the Unnamable, Clov and Hamm, Vladimir and Estragon, or Winnie and May; Kristof's twins; and Coetzee's Magistrate, Michael K, Magda, Paul Rayment, or Señor C.

Starting with the body as everything that is capable of action, I have sought to interpret embodied enunciations or physicalized encounters of utterance first in the works of Beckett. I have identified the role that the incorporeal performs in his writing, insofar as it preconditions the corporeal; it is here that the significance of utterance becomes legible in the totality of its production. In order to decipher the complex relationship between the corporeal and the incorporeal in Beckett, I have looked at his bodies that meet and fail to meet, that move and are unable to move, voices that utter and those that endure the impulse to do so without being able to enunciate. This has led me to the notion of subjectivity as constituting and de-constituting, always forming and changing, and with failure playing an integral role in these processes. Furthermore, this frames anethics as a modality of encounter, not as an encounter that failed, with inability, powerlessness and impotence similarly reordered as different modes of endurance in being, rather than failed attempts of affirmation or perseverance. Therefore, even when the bodies become disembodied and sayability veers into ill-sayability or utter un-sayability, what has arisen from this denudation has been the unceasing power to persevere, and ultimately an unremitting endurance of utterance. Throughout the chapter on Beckett, I have traced the instances that have assisted in

establishing the process of detached attachment and the maxim of withholding assent as constitutive to utterance, as well as to the anethics of endurance as such.

These two key concepts have been further delineated in the chapter on Kristof. Here, I have also expanded my understanding of the role of perseverance, language, exercise as a form of practice, trauma as a process of unfolding, and erasure as a modality of production. Regarding detached attachment and withholding assent, I have focused more closely on the de-personalized, de-particularized and even erased forms of existence. In my attempt to outline anethics at the threshold of imperceptibility, I have followed Kristof's twins in their pursuit of survival on the brink of death, in their desire for life that is neighbouring on dying. Here, I have also looked at the radical violence and vulnerability that the twins faced, and how it led them to an exploration of utter presence even in trauma, pain, sexual exploitation, and total disappearance. To expand this, furthermore, I have addressed the role of ascetic exercises that the twins performed with the goal of reaching desensitization and detachment and examined their (an)ethical implications. Ultimately, this enabled Kristof to investigate the complexities of self-preservation and self-creation (although it also led her to self-erasure), and this advanced my conceptualization of subjectivity as a dynamic, active, and always evolving form, void of a pre-determined structure, always inter-related to others persevering in the endurance of their being.

The concluding chapter has focused on Coetzee's investigation of the drive for life and the desire to endure even in the most intractable conditions. As he blurs fiction with an inquiry into the process of writing itself, Coetzee explores the role of language in the composition of the self, the function, and the scope of writing, as well as of the events that takes place across the surfaces of the various bodies, animal, human and non-human. He portrays characters that examine their own existence, their struggles to persevere in dire circumstances, as well as their attempts at deconstructing mastery and subjection. I have sought to establish these examinations in terms of encounters that renounce reciprocal recognition as a co-appropriating dialectic of alterity, and have instead chosen shared vulnerability, radical openness, and mutual autonomy in their inter-connected embodied engagements. As an ethical maxim, withholding assent to this type of mutual recognition, but also more generally to submission to figures of mastery, has enabled the position of detached attachment from supremacy, as well as from an *a priori* established subjectivity, even when it come to the form of the writer as creator.

This has produced a comprehensive and far-reaching impact on the potentiality of ethics as such, but also more specifically on the ethics of writing.

Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee each variously dramatize modes of self-transformation in a way that draws on the power of subtraction and failure as potentialities for new compositions and encounters. Their anethics of endurance operates through a bareness of living, as if fuelled by impotence, dissolution, or death. Their shared experience of lessening and weakening in life, and in writing, generates a unique class of philosophical, ethical, and political positions, which I have described in the concepts of withholding assent, detached attachment, and the anethics of endurance. Within the continuous triologue of Beckett, Kristof and Coetzee, these concepts have facilitated the creation of a new modality of ethics which opens a new ground of possibility for equality. Anethics of endurance embodies the sheer perseverance of every singularity, disinhibiting the corporeal forces that shape embodied encounters, while remaining dependent on their incorporeal conditions. Allowing these singularities to exist in their autonomy can only be achieved by withholding assent and detached attachment, yet it must be accompanied by a pledge of allegiance to bare life (rather than to rules, imperatives, or regulations), and by remaining indomitably faithful to the obligation to utter. In this manner, the writing of Beckett, Kristof, and Coetzee can authorise an expansion of inter-connected inter-subjectivities, all sovereign in their differences, yet all inter-weaved in their collaborative acts of encounters. And with this, it can propose a new type of a political and ethical resistance, an enduring disruption of all forms of co-appropriation and subjugation.

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