



POSTHUMAN KNOWLEDGE

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Chapter 7

The Inexhaustible

The underlying current of this book has been affective. Throughout I have addressed the complex and internally contradictory alternation of emotions that marks the posthuman convergence. Excitement and exhilaration in view of the Fourth Industrial Age, flip into anxiety and fear at the thought of the huge costs and damages inflicted by a Sixth Extinction, on both human and non-human inhabitants of this planet. The spread and recurrence of the negative pole of this manic-depressive affective economy is quite concerning. Exhaustion and fatigue have become prominent features of the contemporary psychic landscapes. Exhaustion is witness to the daily and nightly struggles that mark our interaction with the complexities of the present.

It is not easy to address these issues. Words, in so many ways, falter and fail. One can only talk about exhaustion in a language reduced to its ossified minimal components, a language that has reached the edge of what it can express, approximating silence, but not falling into it just yet. Exhaustion almost longs for a neutralized style that has perfected ways of de-linking from grand statements of meaningful action. Exhaustion requires a language that is through with power as *potestas*. Such a language is not weak, so much as disconnected from the sovereign power of the master signifier who means what it says and says what it means. Exhaustion is meaning-free and antithetical to judgements and authoritarian injunctions.

In the first chapter I mentioned that exhaustion is its own, intransitive state: one is tired of something, but exhausted by nothing and everything. Being tired leaves open the possibility of rest and recovery, whereas exhaustion just is what it is. In this final chapter I will activate the affirmative ethics and argue that exhaustion is not only negative. Like all affective states, including for instance vulnerability, exhaustion essentially expresses our capacity to affect

and be affected by others. As such, it affirms our relational openness to the world and therefore can be very productive.

Accepting one's vulnerability as the starting point for a process of transforming it collectively and socially, expresses a sort of epistemological humility that reiterates the never-ending nature of the processes of becoming. It defends community-based experiments to transform the negative conditions and states into affirmative alternatives. It is a praxis that promotes action and knowledge out of negativity and pain. This pro-active activism manifests the living beings' shared ability to actualize and potentiate different possibilities. This transformative energy is the core of affirmative ethics.

What is inexhaustible is the potential that all living organisms share for multiple actualizations of yet unexplored interconnections, across and with humans and non-humans. This is the immanence of a life that can only be co-constructed and jointly articulated in a common world. What is inexhaustible is not some transcendental and abstract notion of Life with capital letters, but rather the more patient task of co-constructing one's life, alongside so many others. Just one life, following the formula of the ancient Stoics, can only be predicated in a constant, friendly companionship with pain and suffering. This in turn means that ethics is the practice of extracting knowledge and wisdom from the reworking of pain. Pushed to the extreme, it brings us face to face with mortality, the extreme manifestation of vulnerability. Death is the painful event par excellence, but it is also the event that marks our inscription into the time of our life. As such, at the level of awareness, it is the event that has already happened, because to be born means to become mortal. As such, it is a strangely impersonal event. Death marks the outer boundary of the limited time we have at our disposal. Being aware of this limit can be an energizing thought, not a catastrophe.

The co-construction of affirmative ethics actualizes virtual possibilities in the present. It marks a qualitative transformation of our shared sense of becoming in time, by opening into the non-place where the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' reverse into each other, unfolding out and enfolding in their respective 'outsides'. In this continuous flow, the present becomes both a memory and a promise. Actualizing the virtual is a praxis, not a miracle. It is an act that cannot be understood apart from the transformations and the connections it produces. 'Becoming' is a way of configuring this leap itself. It refers to the actual transmutation of values that will propel us out of the void of critical negativity, into the generative encounters with others that also gravitate towards positivity, or affirmation. It is an affirmation of the generative powers of life that involves friendship with impersonal death.

Stoicism is highly relevant for the posthuman convergence, because it teaches us how to work through painful experiences, notably the sense of loss, dispossession and fear for the future. Moreover, stoicism is relational and interactive. Composing just a life and gearing it to affirmation by reworking pain as an ethical praxis does not assume a sovereign individual subject, but rather foregrounds the transversal structure of subjectivity. It lays down the rules for the collective self-styling of alternative subject positions, beyond individualism, Eurocentric Humanism and anthropocentrism. Affirmative ethics encourages us to train for making the most of one's powers and capabilities, so as to become the most affirmative possible version of what one could be, through the pain and the acknowledgement of mortality.

Sceptics will see this as being concomitant with neo-liberal self-management techniques, whereas it is intended to be exactly the contrary. It is a way of decelerating and escaping the multiple speeds of reterritorialization by capital, by focusing on alternative values.

What matters most is to intervene upon these speeds and accelerations of advanced capitalism, disrupting their ruthless expansion by introducing different forces. The actualization of the virtual is a concrete political praxis, progressive and liberating when implemented collectively. Escaping velocity by a process of self-exhaustion is a way of turning down one's organized identity and sense of self, the better to resist the lure of acceleration by the spinning machine of capital.

The source of the resistance is the resilience of *zoe*. The point of affirmative ethics is that *zoe* cannot be reduced to devalued and dehumanized life (as Agamben claims), but needs to be opened up to encompass the varieties of non-human lives. In the vital neo-materialist framework, *zoe* is posited as the 'power of life' as *potentia*. Posthuman resistance must mobilize for the compositions and collective construction of alternative subject formations and forms of life that are not wholly exhausted by the negative force of power. Politics requires not just resistance, but the effort to activate the generative force of virtual possibilities. Indeed, *zoe* as bare life is devalued life, assigned the status of disposable scapegoat. Many lives today are the object of biopower's thanato-politics, doomed to ethnic cleansing or slaughter, to being killed without their killer being held accountable. Many of these lives are not human. My point, however, is that *zoe* exceeds these negative conditions, because *zoe* exists outside and anterior to sovereign power and hence resists subjugation. This is the greatness of affirmative thought as a secular, materialist philosophy of becoming. It is an inexhaustible generative force that potentially can transmute lives into sites of resistance – all lives, also the non-human.

Life as endless immanent power of becoming is inexhaustible, even though specific bound forms of it are not. *Zoe*, as a force exceeding anthropocentric perspectives and humanistic expectations, offers resources to resist the reterritorializations of advanced capitalism.

These resources do much more than provide resistance: they are the seeds of alternative forms of empowerment. This is about becoming otherwise other. Life is a generative force beneath, below and beyond what we humans have made of it. *Zoe/geo/techno* perspectives at the core of this heterogeneous definition of life are sites of resistance. They provide multiple alternatives to the devastations of necropolitics and the entrapment of bio-political management of Life as capital.

The desire to persevere in the affirmative project of constructing and empowering just *a* life is thus a praxis of in-depth resistance to macropolitical structures and hierarchical relations of power. It acts as a force of creative replenishment for thought and action. This is the force of virtuality. It opens up a desire that is not predicated on the negative principles of Lack and Law, but on relational affirmation and plenitude. Desire is always social. It follows then that desire also plays a role in the production of political passions, that is to say in the affects that structure our social imaginary and our political aspirations. I have argued in the first chapter that the people living in Continental Europe right now are suffering from theory fatigue, post-work fatigue and democracy fatigue. Neither the European project nor democracy as an unfinished project excites the collective imagination any longer. If anything, illiberalism has acquired a cool status. Kick-starting some positive reconfigurations of becoming-Europeans in the post-nationalistic and minor sense of the term is a way of rekindling the collective desire for democracy.

Collective imaginings and shared desire also play a major role in the social construction of negative political passions. In the context of contemporary Europe, and with its legacy of the disasters of the twentieth century, it is important to name and resist new forms of microfascism that are emerging. Microfascism brings about the paradox of a desire that desires its own repression and its un-freedom.

This is unfortunately the recipe of contemporary illiberal and populist movements. Defined as the love for a strongman, fascism promises to solve all your problems: to make the trains run on time, to restore the British Empire, to solve the world's problems by tweeting abuse at imagined enemies late at night, and – inevitably – to chase away all foreigners, all transgressive others, all non-aligned subjects.

Contemplating the state of the present, one is struck by the delusional, infantile, but also homicidal quality of a desire that desires its own extinction and marries into the cult of destruction. This is a systemic blockage of the affirmative force of desire. It produces an endless implosion of what could have been a mode of becoming. This is precisely the kind of negativity that anti-fascist subjects need to be on guard against. Importantly, the fascist has to be traced not only in the 'other', but also within yourself. 'The fascist inside you' is this totalitarian entity that dispels relational connections and instils suspicion and hatred. It leads to scapegoating instead of pursuing adequate understandings of our conditions. One can undo the fascist inside by acknowledging one's attachment to dominant identity formations and power structures. This acknowledgement is the precondition for the practical task of changing the negative habit into affirmative relations. This praxis requires opening up to others and co-constructing alternative social structures and alternative desires that sustain the task of transforming the negative. Returning desire to its affirmative structure is a way of learning to live the non-fascist life, that is to say a life guided by the ethics of relational affirmation as outlined throughout this book. But what a huge task that is! Fatigue, fear and boredom overlap and accumulate to produce a feeling of utter impotence. This closing down of the horizon of possible actions is the symptom of the negativity of our times. Negativity expresses itself in a social and

psychological dimming of a sense of possibility, which triggers a systemic fragmentation and a shattering of our relational capacity. This weakening of the desire to act often feeds an appeal to external powers to take over the task of organizing how to live our lives. This negativity ultimately brings about a shrinking of our ability to take *in* and *on* the world that we are in, simply because it hurts too much to take it in and on. We have to dose how much of it we can take, until it gets too much. Too-much-ness is one of the sources of exhaustion, which marks so much of our current predicament. What is inexhaustible, however, is our desire to persevere in living, against all odds. This is the innermost essence, or *potentia* of all living entities: the life in me that does not answer to my name. This vital sense of life is not to be taken for granted, or be sacralized in religious terms. It remains materialist and secular. 'Just a life' expresses a deep sense of belonging to a common world, the one word we have in common. The desire to get on with it is the fragile yet irrepressible bond that interconnects all living entities. This produces a roar of energy that is mostly unperceived and imperceptible, yet indispensable.

The inexhaustible is linked to the virtual, whose ontological orientation is towards becoming actualized. The virtual fuels the ontological force of affirmation. In this dynamic, vital and material worldview, the process of actualization does not exhaust all possible combinations any one entity is capable of becoming. There is a conceptual explanation for this, though the essence of the matter is ethical. Conceptually, the source of this inexhaustible desire to persevere derives from the fact that the actualizations of untapped alternatives and virtual possibilities can never be exhaustive and all-encompassing. Because affirmation is a praxis that affects and transforms the negative conditions, and because of the infinite range

of virtual actualizations, it is logically and materially impossible to exhaust all possibilities.

To push this even further, as stated on several occasions in this book, the process of actualization is not reducible to a dialectical overturning of power relations. That would merely consume one pole of the opposition by activating the other. In a neo-materialist perspective, it is rather the case that the counter-actualization of the virtual potentiates some of what is possible and leaves alone or does not activate other options. It all comes down to what bodies can do, in the sense of both *potestas* and *potentia*. What is left out of their ability to become otherwise does not reverse dialectically into the negative, either as a form of dead matter or non-life or as a latent reservoir of future revolutionary or anarchical energy. It is simply left alone and is taken out of the current equation, the equation being the praxis of composing a people that aims at actualizing affirmative alternatives.

In a vital neo-materialist perspective, these counter-actualizations entail framing possible modes of becoming, which by no means exhaust the sum total of virtuality. The virtual is infinite because life is. The virtual only matters as far as it is actualized, which does not depend on wilful individualism but on community action. This ontological force of affirmation is instantiated as a collective praxis of alternative subject formations. In this respect, it is neither active nor passive, but located in some other middle ground. It is a sort of becoming-imperceptible of the subject.

The ethical implication is to get going. Affirmative ethics puts the motion back into e-motion and the active back into activism. Because of the abundance of yet unfulfilled possibilities, much remains to be done. That may sound insufficient at a time of such deep transformations and never-ending accelerations, coupled with the swinging moods they bring on, the despair and disenchantment

alternating with excitement and hope. But acknowledging that the virtual is inexhaustible is a source of inspiration that can be turned into a vector of active becoming. Yes, there is so much to do, and it is exhausting just to think of it. But we need to start somewhere, however humbly.

We saw in the previous chapters that reaching an adequate understanding of the mostly negative conditions of our locations enlists the parallel resources of an embodied brain and an embrained body to the task of increasing our power to act. That is to say, to relate more and better to the world. Ontological desire is activated by the evacuation of the self and the exhaustion of wilful activity. Exhaustion thus marks the demise of the sovereign subject position; it is a practice that aims at deactivating the despotic attachment to power, which marks the dominant model of ethical and political subjectivity in Western culture.

Exhaustion, however, is not a pathology that needs to be cured, let alone sedated by the ever-watchful psycho-pharmaceutical industry. Exhaustion is an intransitive state that allows multiple opportunities to stay afloat in a state of latency, always *in potentia*. What sustains the flow of even such low levels of intensity is the desire to become otherwise and the desire for other ways of living and dying. Acknowledging this force is the starting point for the more practical task of doing something about it. The virtual needs to be actualized. And to actualize it we need each other. So, let us settle in the immanence of just a life, which will have been ours, on this damaged planet, in the company of many, and not all of them human. What is inexhaustible is our capacity, our power even, to differ within ourselves, as well as between us. We can extract ourselves from this sad state of affairs, work through the multiple layers of our exhaustion, and co-construct different platforms of becoming. This transformative praxis can only be enacted collectively, together,

as transversal subjects of posthuman times. Shared exhaustion actually unfolds upon a deeper wisdom about what it is exactly that one knows, when one is facing momentous changes in unfamiliar territories. One knows that Life lives on regardless of human pretensions and expectations. 'We' can only intervene in *this* as transversal ensembles, acting collectively: 'We'-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-convergence-together.