

Of Excess: Outline Of A Practical Philosophy. An Introduction

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“What compels me to write, I think, is the fear of going mad”. With this statement, Georges Bataille opens his *On Nietzsche*, a text destined to resonate for a long time in the thought and practice of French philosophy. In the graft between fear, obligation, madness, thought and writing, Bataille inserts the concept of excess, a non-symmetrical half of the Aristotelian right half and therefore a term philosophically afferent to the semantic area of excess, of too much, of the negative. An excess experienced and an excess thought, an excess recognised between Nietzsche’s lines and given back to the reader in the form of a mixture between the written and the unwritten world, theory and experiential content. An excess that is not reducible to the morally connoted static nature of the excessive, but taken in the constant movement of the excessive, an escape from one’s own identity towards an elsewhere, the source of all questioning of the given. Or, the excess of a real that doubles and surpasses all our attempts to keep up, to note the extremes on a diary page in an effort not to be overwhelmed. In both directions, the concept of excess is doubly linked to that of limit, which is also understood in its dynamics: drawing or line in action, gesture which, by widening or narrowing, crosses the ancient perimeter to reconfigure the boundless.

What connects us today, globally, is that we are all currently questioning and redefining what in life is useful, essential, necessary, and inalienable. The ease and speed with which all these notions have been rethought globally forces us to consider the following double-headed theorem. Firstly, as philosophers of biopolitics have correctly pointed out, on the socio-anthropological plane nothing is immune to the invocation of a state of exception, according to which all preventative measures can be implemented in the name of survival. Secondly, and parallel to this (albeit also in a way opposed), the fear of death comes to take the place of the struggle for survival, a fear that Bataille had precisely defined in terms of the dissolution of the real and of its stability. Following this second line of analysis further, that of an anthropology of fear (as Bataille put it), we discover a radical critique of utility, a falsehood tied to capitalist notions of acquisition and conservation. The inalienable and unproductive dimension of expenditure – that of the dissolution of the order of things – reveals to us the paradoxical foundations and functioning of this order, which is to say of consciousness. By objectifying and traumatically separating itself from the real (and from the real subject), the

constituted subject attributes a transcendent status to these illusory socio-politico-economic objects (Law, State, Capital) that only exist relative to itself (and vice versa). On the basis of this movement, the ego which lies at the heart of any genealogy – “as unreal as it is the origin in a Cartesian space” (Bourdieu) – recognises the relative character of its being. Consequently, it recognises the arbitrariness of its constructions. This is why a Maussian anthropology able to disengage itself from the logic of consumption, and to explore a world without measure, opens onto the dimension of excess. This is the dimension of tension that not only throws into crisis the metaphorical light of knowledge and equilibrium (Bataille speaks of a “conscious humanity [that] has remained minor [in this regard]”), but which also empties the soul of its sacredness, in short challenging psycho-physical dualism. In this sense, expenditure becomes indifferent to its own destiny, to its own consumption, an unidentifiable object in a diagram without coordinates of reference. If Deleuze translates the duality “order of things/intimate order” into that of the “molar/molecular”, he nonetheless doesn’t privilege either the concept of expenditure or its unidirectional guiding tension. Instead, he locates expenditure in the bi-directional assemblage of these two dimensions, because “the genesis of the machine lies precisely here: in the opposition of the process of production of the desiring-machines and the non-productive stasis of the body without organs” (Anti-Oedipus). Excess therefore becomes the name of the asymmetrical assemblage of these two non-identical halves or multiplicities, an assemblage that is at the same time both free and artificial since it always needs to be reconstituted anew. This is a joyful articulation immanent to the movement of the real itself, and opposed to all attempts to model one half on the other – the latter giving rise to what Spinoza calls a sad passion, which is to say thinking on the basis of fear.

This is why the paralysing fear we experience, faced with a world that shows us the gap between our cognitive understanding of phenomena – whose unity we only perceive partially in stratified assemblages – and the total unity of the complexity of lived experience brought about by continuous integration, cannot and shouldn’t become the epistemo-sociological basis of thought. These current events force us to think in a way that brings to light the constricted nature of the transcendental and its immanent crisis. The isolation we all find ourselves in now doesn’t prohibit the collective project of establishing a “great Health”, the beating heart of literature and philosophy. Being the physician of both oneself and the world means to not renounce living through the current event with intensity, to not renounce accessing its excessive and transformative dimension, to not renounce playing a role in our becoming-other and in the becoming-other of the entire world. In this sense, and as our issue 7 on literature had shown, the philosophical analysis of symptoms cuts all biological ties to illness in order to emphasise another aspect of its etymology. A symptom is literally what “survives together” or “co-incides”. There are multiple figurations of this “co-incidence” of

the order of things and of the lived, or as Bergson would put it, extended space and the *élan vital*.

The first of these figurations is coincidence, the most intense and perhaps the most dangerous. Ishmael helplessly witnesses the impossible superposition of Captain Ahab, the loner, with the gigantic monster of the seas: it seems in fact that the prosthesis that Ahab is forced to use, and which, paradoxically, replaces with a whale bone the leg that a cetacean tore off, reveals the impossible symbiosis between the two, the rejection (at the same time mental and physical) of the transplant. This excessive dimension of coincidence is perhaps even clearer in Bataille's *On Nietzsche*, where it is translated into simultaneously philosophical, literary and autobiographical writing. In his search for the total man, Bataille rejects history and interpretation to immerse himself in the experience of Nietzschean thought. Thus, he renounces a chronologically ordered reading of lived experience, i.e. every theology, causal relationship, project, morality, in favour of a "total friendship of man to himself", sketching a philosophy of the future in which every moment goes beyond the alternative between sense and non-sense to assert itself in its fullness. This first figuration teaches us then that the thought that rejects non-sense is a thought that at the same time rejects being in its totality, a thought that fails to excise transcendence and, consequently, to experience the vertigo of immanence. But such vertigo can only be reached by saying "we", as Nietzsche does. Here's the unspoken fact of the figuration of coincidence: the adventures of Captain Ahab would not be possible without a narrative voice, that of Ishmael, and a crew; there would be no Bataillan chance without a collective game that defines the impossible. Solitary reflection on death is transformed into a collective experience of the limit, the most powerful expression of life: this is why "writing has never been capitalism's thing".

The second figuration is contestation, namely the movement through which an experience conditions the real. Among the Deleuzian examples of contestation as a strategy of structuring the world, we find Sade and Masoch's contestations of the order of things. This contestation is in fact based on questioning the Law. Irony and humour become the main tools used to overturn the latter. Here, excess is embodied in lived experience and it co-affects reality by reversing its order. With Sade, the tyrant is denounced as a product of the law and society is subtracted from the capitalist demands of conservation. Anarchy, emerging between two regimes of law, testifies not only to its radical difference from any other system of law, but also to its own ability to forge it: Sade reminds us, in fact, that when the government has to renew its constitution, it cannot but turn to anarchy. The suspension of the time of politics becomes the place of a possible transformation of the institutions and the social body. The highest point of this contestation of the State is found in the criticism of the *Urstaat*, as we discover it in *Anti-Œdipus*: "the despotic State is indeed the origin, but the origin as an

abstraction that must include its differences with respect to the concrete beginning”. In the case of contestation, it is then the excess of the concrete beginning that puts into crisis the abstract dimension within which the Urstaat is given in one fell swoop and already armed; it is the desire for a body that goes beyond the desire of any State. With Masoch, excessive zeal in the application of the law shows its paradoxical effects: it is at this point that it becomes clear that the domain of the absurd is the realm in which the chain of causes and effects is suddenly destroyed. As soon as the symptom stops being considered as a mere effect of illness on a passive body, it becomes possible to think of it the other way around as the exaggerated, apparently self-sabotaging yet salvific reaction of an experience faced with the order of things. And it is precisely in this becoming quasi-cause of oneself that a new health emerges and opens the possibility of resistance;

The third figuration is co-incision. To co-incise means to leave a mark through a practice, to orient criticism and the clinic towards the concrete. Co-incising is given at every moment when excess draws its own vanishing line in the order of things: thus, the pathology is not only the scrap of what we call health, but also the position from which one can erode knowledge. At the same time, the minor does not leave the major intact, but creates a collective concatenation of enunciation whose most powerful result is a radical questioning of subjectivity. Schizoanalytic practice (which La Deleuziana explored in issue 9) perfectly embodies this transformative effort of the real. It is here, in fact, that the production of subjectivity offers itself to the diagnostic gaze of those who do not cure the disease that the biological body faces today, but the one which will involve the social body tomorrow. In co-incision, the limit between the individual and the collective is abandoned, the paranoid centripetal movement leaves room for the multiplicity of schizoid centrifugations. Starting from co-incision, a new ethico-aesthetic paradigm, to use Guattari’s words, becomes possible.

Through these three figurations, we can resist the objectifying effect of fear and isolation, without sinking into the drift of obsessive self-analysis, in favour of a collective discourse that aims at the “great Health”. Excess is then configured, through the three figurations, as a theoretical and practical position at the same time. This is a concrete alternative to survivalism, which consists on the contrary in living as little as possible, in reducing existence to what is strictly necessary (and which shares a certain American tradition linked to individualism, to each for himself, if not to isolation and xenophobia, very influential in the libertarian and nationalist currents of the extreme right) and to globalizing capitalism, which today more than ever shows its intrinsic limits.

The issue opens with Pierre Schwarzer’s valuable reflection on the conditions of thinkability of the excessive dimension of the Covid-19 epidemic. How can we, as philosophers, deal

with the emergence of a radical discontinuity without reducing it to a moment in linear time, without subsuming it under a presupposed epistemic teleology? Christian Frigerio continues to question the very possibility of the philosophical becoming philosophical through an analysis of the dominant tendencies of the speculative, discovering in the “viral” a potential pharmakon, a concept capable of showing the way to new forms of individuation outside axiomatic imperialism. Gaia Ferrari’s contribution is also addressed to the multiplicity of forms of individuation: actual and virtual at the same time, individuals are, constitutively, surplus beings. In fact, the process of individualisation both subtracts and adds to the virtual, and can only take place within an intensive impersonal field. In order to grasp the character of necessity in Deleuze’s concepts, Manuel Cebral reminds us, it is not possible to think of them in the abstract, but it is always necessary to grasp them in their being already in relation to other concepts. Constraint and excess, limitation and escape can only occur in a reciprocal relationship, in a dynamism that constantly renews its own progress. However, the confrontation between opposites inevitably brings us back to the tradition of diairesis, the method of Platonic division; through a reflection on purity, the selective criterion of diairesis, Mattia Brambilla reflects on the biopolitical significance of excess and the excessive in the eminent case of the leper’s body, the model of every terror of contact with the other.

Jean Matthys then asks what is needed for critical philosophy to draw effective speculative tools from Deleuzian philosophy, without giving in to the temptation to reduce it to a kind of incantation or mantra, an indisputable metaphysical guarantee that has come to the aid of political praxis. On this point, Jean-Baptiste Vuillerod and Cristina Coccimiglio offer two very different solutions. If Vuillerod situates Deleuzian thought within the political-cultural context of France in the 1970s, allowing the conceptual opposition between Mao and Masaniello to emerge in order to make explicit the political tension linked to Deleuze’s anti-Hegelian Spinozism, Coccimiglio escapes contingency by pushing Deleuzian tools beyond Deleuze himself: starting from Jacques Ellul’s reflections, the author wonders whether it is not possible to overturn the terms of the question, thinking of an ethics of non-power within the broader context of an apparently paradoxical ecology of the technological. The section ends with the historical-theoretical parable drawn by Oriane Petteni, who proposes a reinterpretation of the concept of excess starting from Schelling’s formulation in an anti-Smithian function. In fact, the libidinal economy of Smith’s matrix presents limits dictated by its being conceived within a limited space, that of Newtonian celestial mechanics. The rethinking of spatial coordinates thus makes it possible to redefine the very conditions of thinkability of the economy.

The more exquisitely political section of the journal concludes with the Italian and English translation of Barbara Stiegler’s talk on “Living Being”, given in New York on 30 January 2020, on the occasion of the Night of Ideas. In this text, the philosopher invites us to reflect on the

alleged delay that our ways of life have in relation to the neoliberal advance, as if it were an evolution in the biological sense that required a constant form of adaptation to the environment, insisting on the fact that this “great narrative” is now, however, disqualified by the economic crisis, and by the more general awareness of the limits of vital resources (ecosystems, vital forces in the relationship with work, education, health). The protest movements against Philippe’s government reforms address precisely this criticism, thus denouncing what Barbara Stiegler calls “the slow sinking of neoliberalism”. Strategies of resistance are also addressed by Iain MacKenzie and Robert Porter. Their paper questions the relationship between art, politics and resistance: on what basis do artistic and resistance practices become mutually sustainable as forms of resistance to the integrated capitalist world?

Romulo Moraes tackles the demonic tension often attributed to the sphere of excess. He takes Vilém Flusser’s model of an intrinsically diabolical nature as a starting point for rethinking the boundaries between science and fantasy. A simple mental experiment makes it possible to overlook phenomena classically associated with the natural order in order to rethink them on the horizon of the virtual, resulting in a mixture of data and fantasy. Fabio Treppiedi, on the other hand, moves beyond good and evil in his examination of the “hikikomori line”, an excessive phenomenon suspended between the normal and pathological and irreducible to a single movement. A plurality of tensions whose knowability is bound to experience, the figure of the hikikomori is problematic and transports us beyond the known, thus forging a certain alliance with the philosophical posture. The volume concludes with a review by Matteo Caparrini of M. Pavanini (ed.), *Lo spazio dell’umano. Saggi dopo Sloterdijk*, Kaiak Edizioni, Pompei 2020.