

# Wasted Life

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**E**xhaustion is the somatic culmination of history presented in one body, then another, then another. If exhaustion as a subject has become newly popular, it is because a once proletarian feeling has now become a feeling of the proletarianized all.

The exhausted are plastic and adaptable. They bend better and more to what is necessary for all their having been worn down. They live as fluidly as the water into which a corpse tied with rocks has been plunged, or into which a ship sank, or from which a dolphin surfaced.

The exhausted are always trying, even when they don't want to, even when they are too exhausted to name *trying as trying* or think about it like that. Life doesn't have to be happy to be long. The *trying* of the exhausted is fuel for the machine that keeps running them over in the first place.

*Trying* is the method of traveling with a body through concatenating efforts to find the limit of those efforts' end. You *just can't*, but have to. Now you will. First a breath, next an achievement, then another combination of attempts,

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a failure or a nap or a bad decision, all in an aleaphillic attempt at *attempting*, eating a high protein afternoon snack and playing out with one's existence existing's limit-end.

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The relationship between trying and wanting is overrated: or at least, the primary trying at what you must do is mystified by the secondary trying that happens when a person is convinced that what they must try is what they *want*.

*A person can be anything*, she is told, *if she puts her mind to it* in the economic zone of unfettered personal possibility. It's the free trade of souls across the open borders of indefatigability. It's a series of horizon-wide choices unlimited by limitations except for how all possibilities will be circumscribed by the capacity to exhaust oneself to discover a possibility's end.

Fate was shipwrecked, so in its place they sent us agency. Free to love, free to work, free to get, free to enter multiple and subtle contractual and sub-contractual realms in which each element of a trying person's existence is negotiated to the effect of determining her position only by how it wears her out.

In this version of freedom, the invisibility of all fences is axiomatically the point of every invisible fence. The apparent lack of limits among the limits mystifies both limits and limitlessness. There are horizons that sink, roads and highways that seem to go on for as long as one has the capacity to travel them, then, at the place at which it wears you out, you find the fence.

Freedom ends exactly there, hung up on your own system's failure, a former machine that is now an evaporated-animal,

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all free energy having been expended freely in a quest toward freedom's end.

The trying of the exhausted illustrates the extrinsic actuality of the intrinsically assumed. Our wanting is not our wanting, exactly, when it is exposed like this through being too tired to want anything, and what the exhausted once believed was a desire from the inside of them showed itself to be a desire from what was.

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The exhausted have a desire: to no longer be exhausted. Or the exhausted can have one desire, to no longer be exhausted, as the prerequisite for the possibility of having many desires, to no longer be exhausted so that they can want something other than that again, or want many things, or to want what they really want, to no longer be exhausted so that their bodies can offer the possibility again of love or art or pleasure, of thinking without regretting, of achievement, too, or something beyond failed and sorrowful agency-less trying at the *barely*.

But it's not that abstract, will and lack of it; and not that abstract, being too worn out to want anything but not being worn out anymore; and not that abstract, the hyper-focused agony of not having enough of any life to do with it what one could. The exhausted are exhausted because they sell the hours of their lives to survive their lives, then they use the hours they haven't sold to get their lives ready for selling, and the hours after that to do the same for the other lives they love.

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The exhausted rise each day, or at least most of them do. That they rise most days is testament to the indifferent relationship between how a person feels and what they do.

A person can and often does rise in a *will-optional* attempt at getting out of bed, and when they can't rise, it's almost never from lack of wanting to. No matter how much they *just can't*, the exhausted, if they are living, continue to. They continue to, like everyone who does until they don't anymore, but they continue to more miserably than those who are not exhausted yet. To live and so to eat, drink water, to find a method – work or love – by which to afford to eat, to pay their bills and pay their taxes, to use the bathroom, to put on clothes, to care for their loved ones, requires that they rise, at least sometimes. The exhausted might almost do what they are supposed to do, but as a consequence of their depletion, they almost never do what they want.

The exhausted don't die. Or if they do die, it is only once, like everyone else, and from anything. And there is nothing good to be had from listening to an exhausted body. An exhausted body almost always provides the wrong information. An exhausted body feels like it is dying as a side effect of what keeps it living. It requests, as its preservation, to not move, to not eat, to not work. But its desire for preservation, if fulfilled, is also its destruction, just as its destruction comes from the thousand compliances required of its preservation. The wrong information is also the right information: things can't go on like this, and so they do, and what gets proved is the blurred edge of alive or dead.

Living takes the shape of an effort-to-exist.

In the long night of this *effort-to-exist's* generalized attempt, each hour recedes into a lack of will to achieve a measure of that hour's length. Everything is tried – that's how it gets exhausted – and a person trying to take notes on this writes “I'm exhausted” because they are too tired to put down their pen, *establishing the correctness of a hypothesis by 'exhausting' all the other conceivable hypotheses relating to the question, arriving at a conclusion by the successive elimination of unsuitable alternatives.*

*That you will run out of yourself trying to make yourself* is the yogic prelude to the entrepreneurial rules of our version of history. It's the epoch of Yes; the age of unlimited *Can*, a mass existence in the somo-pathetic fallacy of the body and earth together registering the alarming texture of an enthusiastic attempt at everything that is expiring, the texture of the consequence of all extraction being ourselves as what is extracted from.

Here's an asana of Auto-exploitation:

First, a breath. Then sweating. Now sweating with breathing. Then achievement. Then email and sweating. Now breathing and achieving and emailing. Now working while breathing. Now failure and sleeping and breathing. Now refusing to sleep while breathing or attempting to refuse to breathe while still sweating and failing and achieving.

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Exhaustion as a method of existing combines all actions until it finds the edges of the shape of existing's end. Like everything aleatory, as a method it has one outcome: possibility. This possibility is mostly the possibility that all things will end in exhaustion, though, through every recombination of effort the possibility is that effort itself is effort's end.

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The water is gone because the empty glass tells us so. In order to appear used up, a body has to look like a particular life's packaging, providing rough measure of its interior's resources, then its lack of them.

But this is not how a human exterior works. We are never exactly containers. No body is marked with a measuring line. No face is the archeological record of its former culture of vigor. No one knows how boundless we once were or could be, and by looking, no one knows what it used to feel like to exist, and how different it feels to exist now, or how we were once full and are now depleted.

We can't measure spirit, particularly for how it isn't real except how it feels real when we are acutely aware of our own aridity. But no matter how potentially unalive or indistinct an exhausted person feels inside of herself, her body will, if it appears to others, look like a body, discreet, alive and animate, and capable of trying more, of trying harder, of improving or remedying or aspiring or producing.

The appearance of her body as living's familiar will make its exhausted condition generally illegible. The tired look tired because they aren't trying, even if they are tired from trying. "You look exhausted" we might say to the exhausted only when we remember them as once vital, noticing the alteration only through comparison, meaning you once looked okay but now *you look gaunt, you have circles under your eyes, your face is puffy or your features deformed, you drag and do*

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*not spring, you seem to hold your head above your shoulders with the greatest effort, what you say is not too lucid, you fly off the handle in rage, you cry too easily, your words come out jumbled, you cry and say "I'm tired" and say "I'm exhausted" and you cry because you are tired.*

An exhausted person, trying to look less so, will try, as trying is what she is good at. She will put concealer under her eyes, add blush to her cheeks, do all the tricks the magazines and websites tell her will make her look less exhausted: curl her eyelashes up so that her eyelids might droop less, drink coffee, take Adderall, exercise, realize it is Tuesday, then that it is Friday, then that it is the end of the month, then that it is the beginning, then that time has marched forward without her, carrying with it her to-do list but leaving her behind.

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The exhausted person is “used up,” but can’t ever be articulated like that, only as what must potentially (like everyone else and probably everything in the instrumentalized world) used. The “used up” mostly belongs to substances or objects that can be or commonly are contained, and it is mostly in relationship to their container that what can be used up becomes legible as use-up-able. Probably a thing that can be “used up” can’t be considered actually used until it is gone entirely, and maybe this is because a thing that can be “used up” is often a thing with a use that is recognizably metabolic, like how food or soap or gasoline is recognizably metabolic because of how quickly we watch it turn into something else. The metabolic is only seen by measuring or squinting. The interior of the compost barrel stays dark.

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I got sick, and the treatment made me exhausted, then I began to write about exhaustion the way I used to write about love, developing a semi-erotic longing for assistive devices: a wheelchair and someone to push it, a bedpan and someone to empty it, a shower chair and someone to guide me to it. And like love, exhaustion both required language and baffled language: to paraphrase Clarice Lispector: *like taking a photograph of the scent of a perfume*. And like love, it is not as if exhaustion will kill you, no matter how many times you might declare you are dying from it. Exhaustion is not like death, which has a plot and a readership. Exhaustion is boring, requires no genius, is democratic in practice, lacks fans. In this, it's like experimental literature.

The exhausted are the saints of wasted life, if a saint is a person who is better at suffering than anyone else. What the exhausted suffer better than anyone else is the way bodies and time are so often at odds with each other in our time of overwhelming and confused chronicity, when each hour is amplified past circadianism, quadrupled in the quarter-hour's agenda, Pomodoro-ed, hacked, FOMO-ed, and productivized. The exhausted are the human evidence of each minute misunderstood to be an empire for finance, of each human body misunderstood to be an instrument that should play a thousand songs at once.

This way of life wastes our lives. It structures our time so there is no time left to fit time into time, except for how it will never be enough.

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The exhausted person can spend an hour in consideration of the act of moving each time they are required to move, mentally rehearse this event of movement, preparing each part of their body that would be required to move in what relationship with the other parts of their body. Then the exhausted person might move and find all the mental preparation had no effect on movement's difficulty or ease. All effort takes place in the dim interior and for not much, except what is barely existing. The exhausted find their energy wasted again.

Sleep, which is often the remedy for tiredness, disappoints the exhausted. Sleep is full of the work of dreams, full of the way that sleep begets more sleep, full of the way that more sleep can beget more exhaustion, and that more exhaustion begets more exhaustion for which the remedy is almost never just sleep. The rest that exhaustion requires is a rest from time, from the way we fill time with thought, feelings, and direction.

I was once not exhausted, then I was. I was taken to the moment of depletion and then taken past that, then kept there in this probably-forever, sinking further and further into its ground. What happens if you can no longer self-repair? To be depleted is not to die: it is to do something else, to live beyond oneself, like a body that has been emptied of a soul, like whatever is the opposite of a ghost. And there I was, the opposite of a ghost, confused by my own tiredness and pissed off at having been reduced to the material like this.

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This essay has been extracted from Pamphlet Issue Four, which also features **Daisy Lafarge** and **Hector Castells Matutano**.