



# BIOPOLITICS

A READER

Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, editors

*A John Hope Franklin Center Book*

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## INTRODUCTION

### BIOPOLITICS AN ENCOUNTER

#### 1.

There comes a moment in the history of a concept when, looking back, one recognizes a break, an event, something that appears to have set in motion everything that comes after; when what was impossible to see before presents itself, now seemingly without complication, as the origin that provides the lens with which the lines of future pasts can be glimpsed. As a result, not only do the earlier contexts by which the concept was understood shift, but so too does the horizon of meaning shared with other concepts—the moment when living contexts, as Walter Benjamin might say, are transformed into the origin of the concept itself.

No such singular moment comes to mind when charting the history of biopolitics. No defining interval offers itself as the lens able to superimpose the past and the future, allowing us to look back and say, “ah, yes, it was precisely then that biopolitics was born, exactly then that politics gave way to biopolitics, power to biopower, and life to *bios*, *zoē*, and the forms of life that characterize our present.” Part of the reason for the missing origin of biopolitics may be simply a question of time—or better, not enough time, as not enough time has passed for a complete accounting of biopolitics, biopower, and for their possible genealogies and archaeologies to have been written. Indeed, it is only today, at a moment that seems both belated and too soon, that a codification of the biopolitical is underway. For many years now, in a process that is more automatic than one would hope, we have been witnessing the seemingly inescapable selection of authors and texts, the exclusion of others, the catalogue



of genres that characterize the field of study—in a word, the writing of a canon. Given that such a project remains incomplete, competing versions, not only of the origins of biopolitics, but also of the question of its principal subject and object, will continue to spark debates, transatlantic and transpacific exchanges, and struggles for conceptual dominance. This is a salutary part of the codification currently underway; it is essential for coming to terms with why biopolitics continues to be featured so prominently in contemporary ontologies of the present. To be sure, this means that no point for observing the totality of biopolitics is available to us: there exists no perspective that would allow us to survey and measure the lines that together constitute the concept's theoretical circumference. But this also means that what at first appears to be an endless process—debating the endlessly blurred boundaries of biopolitics—is at one and the same time something else as well: an occasion for thinking. It is an opportunity to free ourselves from any one map for navigating the rough seas of the biopolitical, be it the straightforwardly historical and empirical, the phenomenological, the existentialist, the post-Marxist, or the posthuman. What to some might feel like a missing ground thus evokes for us a different response: an invitation to be creative; a call to ask impertinent questions that one normally might be too embarrassed or too afraid to ask; a solicitation to bring other methodologies, practices, and interpretive keys to bear on the study of biopolitics so as to mark, with all necessary caveats, where we stand in relation to it.

With this in mind, the following pages have been written not merely under the sign of biopolitics, its emerging limits, paradoxes, and increasing theoretical weight, but also its recesses, folds, and shifting contours. To do so we have opted to dramatize biopolitics as the expression of a kind of predicament involving the intersection, or perhaps reciprocal incorporation, of life and politics, the two concepts that together spell biopolitics. The problem at the core of that meeting—the task, perplexing yet also inescapable, of coming up with a theory to make sense of the encounter between the concepts of “life” and “politics”—also lies at the very heart of some of the most exciting and difficult developments in scholarship today.

The reasons for this centrality are, in one sense, not hard to understand. So many of the crises that force themselves upon our present, after all, seem to pivot on the very same axis. Today, for example, we witness the resurgence of neo-Malthusian anxieties that overpopulation and high birth rates in “undeveloped” regions will push the earth's various agricultural “carrying capaci-

ties” beyond their breaking point. We participate in debates over healthcare, social security, retirement ages, abortion, and immigration that are so chronic, bitter, and entrenched that in many countries they have led to violence and the breakdown of longstanding political institutions. We engage in struggles over the unequal global distribution of essential medicines and medical technologies, manifested most visibly in the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We observe a constantly morphing “War on Terror” (or, as it is now called, “Overseas Contingency Operations”) whose security tactics range from drone strikes to racial profiling to the normalization of exceptional juridical spaces such as indefinite detention in Guantanamo Bay to the massive surveillance of all forms of electronic communication. We discover the emergence of a global trade in human organs, with body parts excised from the healthy bodies of the poor in impoverished regions of the earth, and then transported and transplanted into the sick bodies of the rich. We experience the development of new technologies whose innovative potentialities strain, to the point of rupture, against established codes of intellectual property rights, not to mention longstanding traditions of morals and ethics, producing not only what seem to be unprecedented possibilities for a new mode of political economy—a “commons” that is neither private nor public—but also the conditions for a redoubled return of old fantasies of “immortality”: whereas the modern subject dreamed of becoming a “prosthetic God,” the contemporary subject wants to use technology to overcome mortality itself, once and for all, whether through a gradual, generalized “negation of death” or through the achievement of a sudden, rapturous “singularity.”<sup>1</sup>

The examples could be multiplied, but our point by now should be clear: taken together, these crises have produced a context in which there is a demand for scholarly theories that illuminate the relations between life and politics. To this demand there’s been at least one particularly strong response: the reactivation of an account of life and politics offered some thirty years ago by a French philosopher named Michel Foucault. Foucault’s first analysis of “biopolitics” appeared in a short piece, more an appendix than anything else, titled ominously enough “Right of Death and Power over Life,” which forms the final part of his 1976 book, *La volonté de savoir*.<sup>2</sup> That this little text eventually would launch its own share of articles and books was not at all clear in 1978, when the text first appeared in English as Part III of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Those of us old enough to remember reading it nearly upon publication will recall that early scholarly attention initially focused on Foucault’s

finding that sexuality was a problem for the Victorians—a then shocking discovery that today is more likely to elicit shrugs than anything else—and on the implications of Foucault’s concept of power for Freudianism and Marxism.<sup>3</sup> The text’s concluding passages on biopolitics, by contrast, seemed anomalous if not aberrant: apparently unconnected to the pages that preceded them, these passages also would seem disconnected from the two further volumes of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault would publish before his untimely death in 1984. Consequently, it seems, Foucault’s short remarks on biopolitics would be received by Anglophone scholars in a most symptomatic manner, with a silence all the more pronounced for appearing at a moment when Foucault’s work otherwise was becoming influential in almost every discipline in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, however, these other pages of the *La volonté de savoir* began to gain traction. Certainly, feminist readings of Foucault’s biopolitics, especially Donna Haraway’s 1989 essay on postmodern bodies, played an early and important role in pushing forward biopolitics as a central category in postmodernity.<sup>5</sup> The same could be said for readings set forth by Étienne Balibar, Paul Gilroy, Agnes Heller, and Anne Laura Stoler, each of whom, albeit in very different ways, singled out the term in the 1990s as a decisive horizon for studies of the politics of race.<sup>6</sup> Yet it was not until 1998, with the English translation of Giorgio Agamben’s provocative rereading of Foucault’s “Right of Death and Power over Life” in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*,<sup>7</sup> that Foucault’s long-dormant text on biopolitics was reactivated in its current form. With the appearance of Agamben’s controversial commentary on Foucault, which in 2000 was followed by the very different but equally controversial appropriation of Foucault by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire*,<sup>8</sup> the concept of “biopolitics” began to migrate from philosophy to not-so-distant shores, including but not limited to the fields of anthropology, geography, sociology, political science, theology, legal studies, bioethics, digital media, art history, and architecture.

The result is what might be called a “biopolitical turn”: a proliferation of studies, claiming Foucault as an inspiration, on the relations between “life” and “politics.” As part of the voracious intellectual appetite for everything biopolitical, a slew of related neologisms has entered into circulation. In addition to bioethics, biotechnology, biopower, and biohistory—“bio-”terms that were all, in one way or another, already in circulation prior to the biopolitical turn—scholars now proposed to study bioculture, biomedica, biolegitimacy,

bioart, biocapital, biolabor, bioscience, biohorror, bioeconomics, bioinformatics, biovalue, biodesire, biocomputing, biotheology, biosociety, and biocentrism, among others. Working in the best experimental spirit of the philosophic traditions of empiricism and nominalism, the inventors of these neologisms seemed to have wanted to shed light on what's new or unprecedented about the present. And yet even as the content of these terms seemed fresh and new, their form remained familiar, even traditional. It's odd, after all, that the standard nouns of disciplinary reason—art, culture, science, society, economics, capital, and so on—should so consistently repeat themselves at and as the root of these inventions, as if the old objects of existing academic discipline would somehow be transformed simply through the piecemeal addition of the prefix “bio-.” Indeed, interpreted as a general phenomenon that exceeds the consciousness of any single scholar, the compulsion to reinterpret everything today in terms of biopolitics appears to repeat a similar inflationary tendency that began nearly two decades ago, when during the “cultural turn” of the early 1990s it seemed like everything could and should be reinterpreted with reference to “culture.” If it's the case that today's biopolitical turn is warranted by some sort of desire to comprehend the new, something unprecedented in our present, it's thus curious that the neologisms through which this desire has expressed itself nevertheless silently obey a disciplinary grammar that is anything but new.

Other scholars, reacting with irritation to the compulsive novelty that seems to drive the biopolitical turn, have written it off as nothing more than a mere fad. For these scholars, biopolitics is little more than a passing trend of academic fashion, and a particularly insidious one at that. Not least because the biopolitical turn has brought with it renewed attention to the sort of ontological problems to which the empiricist social sciences have long been allergic, these critics have tended to denounce the emerging discourse on biopolitics for its neglect of historical and cultural contextualization, for its monolithic, reductive, and homogenizing claims, and for its embrace of a theological lexicon that seems to be mystifying and vague, if not also politically regressive. The brusque tone of this criticism notwithstanding, it's far from clear that dismissals of this sort allow any escape whatsoever from the full thrust of biopolitical questioning. Some skeptics of biopolitics, for example, seem to believe it possible to disregard the claims that characterize the biopolitical turn simply by pointing out its incommensurability with the redemptive energy of the existing principles of modern democracy. These same critics, however,

often fail to ask what it means that these very same principles derive their energy precisely from the secularized assumption—thanatopolitical to the core, if Agamben is correct<sup>9</sup>—that every human life is and must remain sacred. These scholars seem to want a secular, egalitarian politics that improves the living standards of the world’s populations; but they cannot account for the genesis and basis of their own sense of urgency (or, as Hannah Arendt might put it, for the way they experience the “necessity” of their own political commitments). In the end, it seems to us, the tendency to dismiss biopolitics as “mere fashion” is not only premature (since so often the very premises of these same dismissals, unexamined as they are, testify to their failure to fully digest the conceptual challenge of biopolitics). It’s also, ultimately, just as symptomatic as is the tendency to turn biopolitics into the very synecdoche of “the new”: neither approach, in our view, is able to understand why it is that biopolitical inquiries into the relation between life and politics should turn out to require, with such unusual regularity, a fundamental rethinking of one of the basic categories of the philosophy of history, namely, *the event*.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.

This anthology offers the reader a chance to produce a much different response to the biopolitical turn. We think there’s a more difficult, but also more rewarding, way to think about the demands of a world in which the couplet of life and politics seems to reappear as the innermost interior of every fresh crisis. Rather than *enthusiastically affirm* biopolitics as the newest, latest, and most obvious theoretical response to these crises, *hastily reject* biopolitics as nothing more than the newest, latest, and most passing of academic fads, or *defensively reify* biopolitics into yet another empiricist and historicist research agenda, we propose an *attentive re-reading* of the texts that today have become the source of so much dispute, in so many languages and regions, and that as such have come to constitute something like a “paradigm” of biopolitics.<sup>11</sup> This will be a rereading that doesn’t pretend, as do the various declensions of the biopolitical turn, that there’s a coherent concept of biopolitics that can be extracted intact from *La volonté de savoir*, as the prior condition for its straightforward affirmation, rejection, or application. Put differently, we don’t suppose that Foucault’s brief remarks on biopolitics, whether in his little 1976 book or, especially, in the lectures concurrent with that book, can be interpreted as though they are consistent, transparent, and fully worked-through.

In our view, Foucault's foray into biopolitics was anything but straightforward. Filled with doubts and second thoughts, Foucault's writings on biopolitics involve shifts, feints, changes in focus and direction—perhaps even, as Foucault's most ungenerous critic has put it, “deceptions.”<sup>12</sup> What appear to be explicit conceptual innovations thus turn out to be, on reflection, implicit returns to problems Foucault had thought through earlier in his intellectual itinerary. What looks like a coherent path for thought, mapped out in detail and in advance by this “new cartographer,” reveals itself instead to be a trail that fades away into the conceptual wilderness. Conversely, what seem to be explicit rejections of research on biopolitics, turn out on second thought to be intensified engagements with biopolitics, only now on a new plane and in different terms. All of this implies a very definite reader of Foucault: one who is alive not only to what Foucault *said* in these pages but also, and much more importantly, to what Foucault left *unsaid*. This will be a reader who is less concerned with affirming, rejecting, or applying Foucault's “biopolitics,” than with understanding precisely the *turbulence* of Foucault's text—its “hesitations, doubts, and uncertainties.”<sup>13</sup> She will understand not only how these generative opacities *enable* the various declensions of the biopolitical turn but also, and, again, much more importantly, retain the potential *to exceed it from within*.

Supposing a reader of this sort, we want to begin the task of rereading by returning now to the text that seems to so many to have been the birthplace of biopolitics: the final pages of *La volonté de savoir*. We reopen this text with the intention of preparing the reader, in turn, to take a fresh look at the more recent texts on biopolitics—the texts that, together, have recursively constituted *La volonté de savoir* as a sort of *Urtext*, an original score that seems to have guided the way the relation between politics and life has been understood in the biopolitical turn. Our aim is to linger with the reader, in particular, over a set of utterances that, precisely in their repetition over the last three decades, seem to have materialized into what Foucault himself would call “statements”—the nuclei, as it were, around which discourses form.<sup>14</sup> Our desire is neither to praise or blame this refrain, nor to chant or march along with it. We instead want to enjoin the reader to hear with us in these statements a different set of repetitions, a set of silences that seems to us to be arhythmic and aberrant, but to that same degree inviting and even provocative. This is a rereading that begins to unfold only once the reader first becomes alert to *the impasses* Foucault encountered when he tried to work through the relations of life and politics in

the closing passages of *La volonté de savoir*.<sup>15</sup> There are at least four: *species living*, *the power of life*, *the new millennial animal*, and *the resolution to live*. Scored together, these impasses allow us to take a step back from our common sense about the relation of life and politics, in order to inquire into its meaning, conditions, and goals. Taken together, in other words, they allow for the encounter between life and politics to be “problematized,” and as such, to be thought anew.<sup>16</sup>

### *Species Living*

The first impasse in Foucault’s account of life and politics involves the introduction of what Foucault in other venues refers to as knowledge-power. In *La volonté de savoir*, Foucault relates this particular form of knowledge-power not only to the emerging field of biology, but also to the development of “different fields of knowledge concerned with life in general,” agricultural techniques among them.<sup>17</sup> The period of European history in question is one to which Foucault will return repeatedly in his discussions of biopolitics: the period immediately preceding the French Revolution. The overall effect of these changes was a relaxation of death’s grip over life; not absolutely, he notes, but relatively. He writes:

In the space for movement thus conquered, and broadening and organizing that space, methods of power and knowledge assumed responsibility for the life processes and undertook to control and modify them. Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in optimal manner. For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge’s field of control and power’s sphere of intervention.<sup>18</sup>

In this passage, Foucault locates a junction for life’s future enmeshment with politics. As death withdraws, however slightly, gains are made in knowledge about the “substrates” of life that have now become accessible. With this shift, in turn, we witness the emergence of a “space”—a year earlier in his lectures at the Collège de France collected in *Security, Territory, Population*, as well as in the last text he would ever author, he will prefer to speak of a “milieu”<sup>19</sup>—in

which “Western man” attends to the significance of being part of a species that lives while at the same time living in a world that is alive. In making this claim, Foucault seems to assume that before the confluence of life and politics that emerges thanks to the development of these life-producing techniques, “Western man” *did not* fully apprehend life in terms of “species,” nor that the world in which “Western man” lived actually merited the qualifier “living.” Foucault will give to this history a curious name—“biohistory”—that is, at present, just as neglected as “biopolitics” was a decade ago. With this term, Foucault proposes to mark those moments of pressure “in which the movements of life and processes of history interfere with one another,” and which, in turn, parallel an intensification of biopower.<sup>20</sup> Foucault will place a caesura at the moment of life’s greatest interference with history, distinguishing a period prior to their encounter that he in the essay (as well as across his lectures at the Collège de France from 1975–1976 in “*Society Must Be Defended*”) will call “sovereignty.” Before death’s respite, Western man, when not dead, was, according to Foucault, less alive than he later became.

We can well imagine why: when the risks of death appeared imminent through epidemics or war, the possibility of feeling alive was much more limited. And yet such a division between history and biohistory proper raises a question, one that informs so many of the essays collected here. What really does it mean to say that life has a history? Life—the very paradigm, it would seem, of novelty and renewal itself<sup>21</sup>—seems constitutively opposed to “the past” that history cannot but take as its object, as well as to “the future” history for which cannot help but to prepare us. What sort of “events” would this biohistory consider, and how, if at all, would those “events” differ from the sort of “events” that contemporary philosophers, most notably Deleuze and Alain Badiou, propose to consider? In what ways, for example, might our very experience of “life” or “flesh” today itself, precisely in its immediacy and novelty, derive its implicit schema from a long-past event (such as the secularization and immanentization of the Christian notion of the afterlife, or the emergence of modern democracy in and through the beheading of the king)?<sup>22</sup> What meaning can “life” have in an epoch, when life itself is no longer outside of history, if it ever was, but is now simply an effect of history itself, one of its variables and contingencies? What meaning can living have when no element of life is outside the domain of politics, and no political interest can be found that does not in the last analysis concern life? Conversely, how might certain concepts of life—pertaining to mortality and immortality, necessity and



urgency, newness and the old—inscribe themselves into historiography itself? How might certain presuppositions about life govern the very field within which historical knowledge then comes to be valuable for life? For some of the thinkers who appear in this anthology, the best response to this question will be to retranslate it into new and different terms—displacing “aliveness” with “immortality,” or redirecting “species” toward “multitude.” Others will respond by radicalizing the trope of the organism as machine that has governed modern philosophy since at least Descartes and Hobbes.<sup>23</sup> For these thinkers, the task of biohistory is to imagine a future that does not so much anxiously question as embrace the enframing of “bare life” (or what Agamben calls *zoē*) by *technē*—whether those be the bio-engineered humans of the sort imagined by Peter Sloterdijk, the “materially immortal” beings theorized by Nishitani Osamu, or the sort of cyborg lives for which Donna Haraway called in 1989.<sup>24</sup> And for still others, it signals a defense of linguistic virtuosity or the advantages of hybridity as a model for an affirmative biopolitics.

Foucault’s own perspective in “Right of Death and Power over Life” on “species living” will move across different registers, but as the essay comes to a close he will settle on an important shift in focus: from law to norm. In a series of earlier lectures, of course, Foucault had devised an archaeology of the abnormal, and so in a sense his return to the conceptual axis of the norm isn’t surprising (even if it is, as Roberto Esposito notes, much more opaque than Foucault’s commentators have acknowledged<sup>25</sup>). In *La volonté de savoir*, by contrast, Foucault’s shift from law to norm takes place alongside a homologous shift from history to biohistory, with each shift in its turn being spurred by a specific event: the emergence of population as an object of knowledge and power. With the advent of biohistory, sovereignty wanes and with it the law as the primary means by which sovereign power is exercised. Often the suggestion in these pages is that in a post-sovereign milieu, populations are less subjected to sovereign power than they are governed through norms.<sup>26</sup> The result is that living as part of a species for Foucault entails learning to live with norms. Whereas before the advent of biohistory, Western man did not know how alive he was (just that he was not dead), once the self-evidence of death withdraws, we witness the emergence of contingent standards for what qualifies as living. No timeless, transcendent life and death laws determine the destiny of this species, only changing, immanent measures that allow for the evaluation of varying degrees and kinds of living. Knowing these norms forms a pedagogical imperative for Foucault. Just as laws, Foucault tells us,

become norms, so too do institutions give way to the odd ensembles he calls “*dispositifs*” or “apparatuses.”

Foucault’s use of the term “*dispositif*,” which is much more central to *La volonté de savoir* than the English translation allows us to perceive,<sup>27</sup> has increasingly become the subject of interest on the part of those writing today in a biopolitical key.<sup>28</sup> As such, it will be helpful to dwell here on some of what’s at stake in Foucault’s use of the word. In an interview from 1977, Foucault sets out a number of meanings for the term. The concept of “apparatus,” Foucault says, names “a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble” of elements such as institutions, architectural forms, regulatory, decisions, administrative measures, and laws; it is also a “formation” which responds strategically to “an urgency,” which is why apparatus enjoys a dominant strategic function; it is also “a set of strategies of the relations of force supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> When read against the narrative of life and politics sketched thus far, it rapidly becomes clear why the concept of “apparatus” dominates so much recent reflection. This concept serves as a bridge between life and politics; it is one of the ways in which their chiasmic intersection is measured, effected, and felt as a strategic “urgency.” The result is not that “law fades into the background or that the institutions of justice tend to disappear but rather that the law operates more and more as a norm, and that the judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory.”<sup>30</sup> In this “prologue” to biopolitics, jurisprudence cedes the stage to the apparatus, which aims at regulating life with reference to norms instead of laws, and which discharges this aim with an intensity derived from the newly strategic “necessity” of life for politics.

These apparatuses have a second function as well. Not only do they remind us that we are alive in a living world or that together they separate history from biohistory, separating species that are more alive from those that are less alive; they also represent what Foucault calls “a biological threshold of modernity”: “But what might be called a society’s ‘biological threshold of modernity’ has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies.”<sup>31</sup> To describe this encounter, Foucault will use a curious turn of phrase, one that is by no means self-evident, but one whose implications are worth dwelling on and explicating. Biopolitics, in his phrasing, involves a sort of “game” in which nothing less than the species itself, the species as a living entity, is “at play” or “at stake” [*enjeu*].<sup>32</sup> Given these stakes, it would

be a mistake to underestimate the seriousness of this game. It is in fact a “wager,” a most high-stakes gamble. The impression reading “Right of Death and Power over Life” as well as *The Birth of Biopolitics* and *Security, Territory, Population* is of a game in which life, which before was one among a number of stakes, begins to drift to another in which life has now become the only stake. Some of the reasons for such a drift surely concern the increasing efficiency with which risk is calculated, such that calculations lead to a form of wagering over life. Another reason may well be that the increasing material valuations of life, which were less possible when life was held at bay by death, begin to make it easier for a staking of life in a context of wagering to take place; as long as the knowledge-power on which the operation of apparatuses was premised was insufficient to coalesce as a normalizing power around its object, life.<sup>33</sup> Whatever the reason, an increasingly high-stakes “speculation” about the status of life and living begins. Knowledge of biopolitics entails risky propositions: death’s slight withdrawal for living opens up the space for a knowledge of life that is irreducibly probabilistic in form, such that understanding life’s enmeshment with politics always involves some roll of the dice about the future of both life and politics. In this sense, knowing the story of how life and politics come together means asking how it has come to be that collective life has assumed the form of a massive bet—a deadly serious game of chance in which the population is at once *the central player* and *the main prize*, at once *the subject of politics* and *the objective of politics itself*.<sup>34</sup>

### *Power of Life*

The wagering on life by politics that sets the scene for the birth of biopolitics at the end of the eighteenth century isn’t only focused on a living species. As knowledge-power takes life as its object, and as the norm inflects the law toward it, the body becomes available in ways that it hadn’t before for power. It is at the level of the body that the conjunction of life and politics will be felt precisely because where life before was infinite in Foucault’s account—Foucault will name it “classical being” in his 1966 book *Les mots et les choses*, translated into English as *The Order of Things*—life is soon contained by the body. It is when the body has been opened up and opened by power that we have a *Kehre* or “pivot” that will spell the birth of biopolitics in Foucault’s story.

Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery [*la prise*]

it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life [*la prise en charge de la vie*] more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.<sup>35</sup>

Here, much as we saw above, the story of the encounter between life and politics is marked by a *chiasmus*. Now, however, the chiasmus is not between life and history, but between the body and power. This taking charge of life through the body by power is one that informs as well a number of readings collected here—the immunitary declensions of biopolitics in Donna Haraway and Roberto Esposito in particular.<sup>36</sup> So too Alain Badiou, who will subtly shift the wager from life to life’s boundaries, that is to its ostensible container, the body.<sup>37</sup> This focus on the body in biopolitics as cause and effect for its emergence as a category indicates too that there is a mode of feeling, of being aware of the body, that would make clearer just how often life is wagered across a body’s duration or time, or a subject’s experience. Yet we should also note as many do here that the taking charge of life set in motion by a certain regime of knowledge-power (which we might call the “non-teleological” natural sciences<sup>38</sup>), also includes another kind of holding that isn’t merely on the side of power. Such a possibility of grabbing hold of life “all the way to the body” is not limited to the state or the institution, but is enacted as well by the subject of this new knowledge-power. That possibility is of course at the heart of Foucault’s reading of neoliberalism two years later in *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

We note something else in the encounter between life and politics, which concerns precisely Foucault’s bringing together living beings with how they are seized. This notion of the seizing or the holding of living beings is one that will reappear in the decades following the publication of *La volonté de savoir*, as well as in his lectures from the 1980s. Foucault’s insight is that a power that seizes living beings differs from an earlier power that exercised power over life without also being able to take hold of it. We know the name of such a power: sovereignty. Sovereignty with all its laws didn’t fundamentally “seize” life. The knowledge-power of life, however, does—and it does so in the precise degree that scientific knowledge “grasps” the processes internal to the body. This “hold” over living beings through and across their bodies that precedes the advent of biopolitics is one Foucault spoke about in terms slightly different from sovereignty in *The Order of Things*. There Foucault, in lieu of speaking of sovereignty per se, prefers to describe what he calls the “classical period of being.”

Classical being was without flaw [*sans défaut*]; life, on the other hand, is without edges or shading [*sans frange ni dégradé*]. Being was spread out over an immense table; life isolates forms that are bound in upon themselves. Being was posited in the perpetually analyzable space of representation; life withdraws into the enigma of a force inaccessible in its essence; apprehendable only in the efforts it makes here and there to manifest and maintain itself.<sup>39</sup>

Soon after he notes: “Biological being becomes regional and autonomous; life, on the confines of being, is what is exterior to it and also what manifests itself within it.”<sup>40</sup> These passages precede Foucault’s reading of biopolitics, but they are helpful in making clear the place of the body. One of the ways that “life isolates forms that are bound in upon themselves” will be through the body. We might well conclude then that the body provides “the edge” that power grasps with its new knowledge of life. With this reading in hand, biopolitics, rather than resolving the opposition between life and politics, attempts to solve “the enigma of a force inaccessible in its essence” by isolating life in its corporeal form. The impasse that emerges here pertains to something like a missing chronology. “Classical being” is succeeded by “the enigma” of the force of life, which the conjunction of *bios* and politics in biopolitics answers. In other words, biopolitics is the explicit solution to an inexplicit problem: power’s inability to fully access life. The more that knowledge-power grows in intensity, the more the scene is set for the question of life to be answered by apparatuses that focus, in particular, on the body. As the prior condition for this access, we must call attention to a detail that other readings tend to overlook: in a biopolitical horizon, life becomes representable once again. The analyzable space of representation that before characterized *being* now, thanks to power’s seizure of the body, shifts toward *life*.

### *The Millennial Animal*

Once life encounters the political thanks both to the lessening of death’s felt presence and science’s mastery of life through the body, bets on life begin to be placed at the level of the population. Modern man is born. But here Foucault’s story veers unexpectedly. Rather than simply examining the ways in which politics and life come together across bodies in what Foucault calls an “anatomy-politics,” he returns to the earlier theme of “species living” and re-frames it now as an antimetabole. It is this reframing that continues to grab the attention of so many. The passage: “For millennia, man remained what he

was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.”<sup>41</sup> Let’s linger over the passage for a moment by first noting again the rhetorical move that will characterize so much of Foucault’s reflection and those writing in a biopolitical key more generally. In Foucault’s transposition, the adjective “living” moves from qualifying the noun “animal” to qualifying a much different noun: “being.” The result is that “life” takes up the place of “politics” and “politics” the place of “life.” The reason for this reversal, Foucault argues, is that something has changed with regard to politics. Here there are two moments the reader should register. First, crossing the “biological threshold of modernity,” for millennia political had qualified existence, marking an addition to living. Once the biological threshold for modernity has been crossed, by contrast, politics is now shorn of its qualifying status. Politics is no longer about addition; no longer does it qualify existence. It now appears to have become *autonomous* from existence. The impression is that in some way this autonomy of politics is the condition for problematizing what before was not a problem. The move from “addition” to “autonomy,” from the “political” to “politics,” suggests not only that politics lacks a mooring, but also that one of the main effects of this newly unmoored politics is to confer upon life an unprecedented position. Modern man is no longer a living animal but an animal who has somehow been separated from living being. Where before man was a living animal under conditions of sovereignty, which is to say under the classical episteme, now man is an animal whose living has migrated to being. Only when politics has separated the animal from his living can the very status of living be called into question. The living animal is replaced by an animal whose *living* is in some sense separable from its *existing*—without, we might say with recourse to the etymology of the word “existence” itself, the ability to “stand outside” the living being he discovers himself to be (*ex-sistere*, “to stand outside”). Modern man, in other words, exists in ways that the pre-modern animal did not thanks to a freeing of politics from its mere status as capacity or addition. Power’s “grasp” of life (in the double sense of grip and understanding) does not allow us to stand outside of our own lives, to project ourselves, to devise narratives able to change the conditions of our living non-existence. We are the animal whose politics place that existence—note “existence,” not “life”—in question.

Second, let’s also note that Foucault’s introduction of the animal whose existence is put into question isn’t really all that surprising. As he notes in *The*

*Order of Things* when speaking of Georges Cuvier and the science of living beings, “if living beings are a classification, the plant is best able to express its limpid existence; but if they are a manifestation of life, the animal is better equipped to make its enigma perceptible.”<sup>42</sup> Once the animal comes to manifest life, that is “to show us the incessant transition from inorganic to the organic by means of respiration or digestion, and the inverse transformation brought about by death,” death enters the frame once again. It is this swerving of life toward the animal in biopolitics that re-introduces death, but now from the inside, transforming the organic into the inorganic.<sup>43</sup> The animal in question, it bears remarking, is not Aristotle’s “political animal,” but rather an animal who enframes a specific episteme (to remain with Foucault’s terminology) characterized by a cohabitation of death and life that will be named “living.”<sup>44</sup> We recall that earlier Foucault had described the slackening of death’s hold over life which set the scene for Western man’s opening to species living. Here, however, death appears to return through the backdoor via the animal, which Foucault reminds us was not the case with plants: “The plants held sway on the frontiers of movement and immobility, of the sentient and the non-sentient; whereas the animal maintains its existence on the frontiers of life and death. Death besieges it on all sides; furthermore, it threatens it also from within, for only the organism can die, and it is from the depth of their lives that death overtakes living beings.” The outcome of this change in course of life toward the animal is decisive for biopolitics: “The animal appears as the bearer of that death to which it is, at the same time, subjected; it contains a perpetual devouring of life by life. It belongs to nature only at the price of containing within itself a nucleus of anti-nature.”<sup>45</sup> The intensification of the death-bearing attributes of the animal appears as one possible outcome of the encounter between *bios* and *politika*.

What are we to make of this millennial animal who exists but perhaps does not live and what mode of being is appropriate to the man and woman who have crossed over the threshold of modernity into the crucible that repeatedly sutures life and politics? What kind of chiasmic knowledge is consistent with such an animal? What kind of problems does such an existential animal respond to? These questions are a deeply important part of the following reader. Indeed we might say that all of the writers here are attempting to work through what this state of existential animality ultimately means. In that sense, this reader is directed to the animal that we have become, or are becoming—and this is not just any animal, but the animal whose biopolitics

pose a threat to itself. This is not to say that the authors collected here are in agreement with Foucault's diagnostic. Clearly they are not, but all do respond to it. For our part, we think it worthwhile to reflect on the consequences of the story Foucault tells about life and politics, especially in relation to Foucault's stunning phrase: "a biological threshold for modernity." Even a quick glance at the anthology of readings collected here suggests that the biological threshold for modernity has shifted since Foucault wrote. Where will it be found today?

By way of response, let's return to an earlier moment in "Right of Death and Power over Life" in which Foucault, again in the language of wager and gambling, speaks of another staking of life that occurs thanks to the possibility of nuclear annihilation: "The principle underlying the tactics of battle—that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living—has become the principle that defines the strategy of states. But the existence in question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty: at stake is the biological existence of a population."<sup>46</sup> For Foucault, decisions about the existence of those populations are "increasingly informed by the naked question of survival."<sup>47</sup> Here to survive means crossing the biological threshold of modernity, to become part of a population whose existence is the object of a political wager. Although Foucault will have little to say about the pedagogical effects of this shift, surely one such effect will be learning what it means to be staked collectively—what it means, in other words, to survive, to desire that one's individual existence be sustained through some sort of wager on collective life. Today these gambles would seem to be at the very heart of contemporary existence. In casino capitalism and other assorted forms of neoliberalism, entire populations (of donors, of consumers, of persons) come into existence whose effect is to send its members scurrying to learn how to survive individually. We survive without existing—or, better, we survive individually having forgotten how to exist collectively (given that there is no longer any outside left to view, let alone to stand on).

And yet this existing as part of a population and surviving solely as an individual undoubtedly has another effect, namely to heighten, for a privileged few, the pleasures of being alive. Paradoxically, the more that populations become "unnecessary" or "superfluous" for capitalism, the more capitalism reifies the sensation of aliveness itself as a "scarce commodity" that's "in demand." The more that certain populations are made the object of political strategies that call their very existence into question, in other words, the more



euphorically alive other populations feel—not despite, but because of, the planetary gambles in which they’re involved. This reader asks you to consider this vertiginous wager—this dizzying spiral of pleasure and power—as a third impasse we inherit from the analysis of the “mastery” of life we find analyzed in *La volonté de savoir*.<sup>48</sup>

### *Resolved to Live*

Overcoming classical being and sovereignty, politics now reaches into the interior recesses of life through the body, making life the very subject of and object of politics. Life’s dramatic need to maintain itself and manifest itself as Foucault describes it finds its ally in a form of politics that no longer manifests itself only within the traditional institutions, practices, and discourses of modern politics. We see such a new politics liberated from the traditional political spaces of old everywhere we look: in courts, in Western parliaments, in metropolitan public spaces, and in families in which the political is nowhere to be found.<sup>49</sup> And yet, the very return of the animal no longer moored to the political raises questions about the direction that biopolitics will take from this point forward. This because in Foucault’s analysis the animal carries death within it, setting the stage for the final act in the narrative of life’s chiasmatic exchange with politics. How can life manage to manifest and maintain itself when one result of the emergence of biopolitics is precisely to have intensified the mortifying features of the subject of biopolitics, namely the animal? Another way of saying this would be to note that in the birth of biopolitics, an antinomy with regard to life can be sensed: the increase in the space for living creates an opening for politics, which in turn alters the former relation between death and life. The earlier questions we raised about species living and grabbing hold of life merge into a more fundamental question: what part does politicized death play in the suturing of life and politics?

Here Foucault has little to tell us directly in “Power of Death and Right over Life.” We can glean a number of possibilities from Foucault’s other works. In a seminar that appeared in 1976 as part of the lectures at the Collège de France as “*Society Must Be Defended*,” which is included here, Foucault will link the increasingly significant role of death in biopolitics to racism which reaches paroxysmic levels in the twentieth century during Nazism. In that setting, biopolitics appears deeply homologous to thanatopolitics. There, the living of a certain self-identified “race” of human beings becomes identical with the goal of excluding another “race” from life itself, as if the death inter-

nal to life could be avoided not by deferring it, but by displacing it, by creating a stark new caesura internal to species-being. The form of racism Foucault here invites us to consider is very different from the sort of racism that now has been reified into a “lens” for social scientific research.<sup>50</sup> The racism we experience in the biopolitical field can’t be reduced either to the “biological essentialism” that some complacent critics of racism have come to identify with racism as such, or to the “neo-racism”—the emphasis on fixed and immutable “cultural differences”—that is the dialectical counterpart of this complacent critical dependency on the authority of the natural sciences. It is a paradoxical form of racism, a racism that sorts out and hierarchizes populations without also seeking support either in “theoretical racism” (such as social Darwinism, Malthusian economics, or eugenics) or “spontaneous racism” (the sort that focuses on phenotype, and derives from hatred, ignorance, or irrationality).<sup>51</sup> In the strict Foucauldian sense, in fact, biopolitical racism produces its thanatopolitical effects in populations without any explicit reference to “race” whatsoever. It’s a racism that, instead of referring to “race,” now refers, thanks precisely to the universalist tendencies of contemporary biology, only to ambiguous caesuræ internal to a single “species.” It doesn’t seek to exclude certain populations from the institutions of civil and political life; it explains why, despite so many painstaking attempts at inclusion, certain populations nevertheless seem permanently incapable of achieving flourishing lives within those institutions. Speaking now in the name not of a “master race,” but on behalf of the entire human species, it helps us understand why enduring disproportions in unemployment, imprisonment, crime, and disease are not matters for political dispute or political resistance, but simply ongoing statistical anomalies and pathologies the available political and juridical remedies for which have been—tragically—exhausted.<sup>52</sup> The result is a racism that is proper to *laissez-faire* capitalist economy: a racism that explains, without open hostility, why the current unequal distribution of biopower—the distribution of the globalized world into “life zones” (where citizens are protected by a host of techniques of health, security, and safety) and “death zones” (where “wasted lives” are exposed to disease, accident, and war, and left to die)<sup>53</sup>—regrettably could not be otherwise.

Foucault, of course, was not content simply to let biopolitics drift to the thanatopolitical. As the recent publication of Foucault’s later seminars suggests (not only the “political” lectures collected together under the titles *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, but also his later

“ethical” courses on the Greeks), the intensification of death across populations is only one among many iterations of the biopolitical. In these other texts, Foucault directs the reader toward governmentality as another possible response to the “power over life.” Such an outlet for biopolitics in governmentality, toward the governing of self and others, is one that Foucault will find in “the production of the collective interest through the play of desire,” leading him to speak of “the naturalness of population and the possible artificiality of the means one adopts to manage it.” At the same time, however, it’s far from clear exactly what sort of politics is implied in Foucault’s writings from this period.<sup>54</sup> For a reader like Jacques Rancière, Foucault’s problematization of “social security” during the late 1970s leaves Foucault’s thought on biopolitics constitutively exposed to an appropriation of a Reaganite sort, where “government is not the solution to our problems, but the problem itself.” Although, on Rancière’s read, Foucault may not be the “technocrat” his earlier critics supposed him to be, the ambiguities of his late books on ethics and politics nevertheless permanently admit the possibility of finding in Foucault the exemplary claims of neoliberal thought.<sup>55</sup>

To be sure, Foucault’s apparent abandonment of the project he outlined in *La volonté de savoir* did take place under conditions defined by the rise to power of neoliberal theories and practices in Deng Xiaopeng’s China, Margaret Thatcher’s England, and Ronald Reagan’s America.<sup>56</sup> Not least, however, because Foucault during this same period focused his attention on the question of what it means for a philosopher to relate to the events of the living present, we would be off the mark were we to consent to this reading too quickly. During these eight incredibly pregnant years of lectures and inquiry—these lectures whose genius is inseparable precisely from their incompleteness, their open and exposed relation to their own present, their “courage” to “think out loud”<sup>57</sup>—Foucault revealed how, among other things, neoliberalism can accomplish the political aims it inherits from pastoral power—its attempts, that is to say, to provide for the “salvation” of both one and all—only on condition that it *first* produce a subject who conducts himself as an “entrepreneur of himself.”<sup>58</sup> Neoliberalism governs by metaphorizing the market as a game, by metaphorizing the state as its umpire, and by metaphorizing individuals and populations as players for whom all choices are in principle possible—with the one exception of the choice not to play the game of the market at all.

Given the way that neoliberalism not only totalizes but also individualizes

us, Foucault's famous "ethical turn" at the close of the 1970s—his shift from the analysis of modern apparatuses of "power-knowledge" to a set of close studies of ancient Greek practices for the "care of the self"—may not be the solipsistic retreat or apology for neoliberalism that some scholars today suppose it was. Not only do these critics of Foucault seem to forget that all of Foucault's ostensibly "modern" studies of "power-knowledge" during the 1970s amounted, in effect, on Foucault's own terms, to an extended interrogation of the genealogy of another ancient Greek figure (namely, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, who in 1973 Foucault situated as a "founding instance" of a relation between power and knowledge "from which our civilization is not yet emancipated"<sup>59</sup>); they also appear to leave in silence the sense in which Foucault's final lectures marked the beginnings of a manifestly philosophical act to cut against the definitive events of his present, to create a political and theoretical lexicon that would be up to the unprecedented task of bringing about the first "anti-pastoral revolution."<sup>60</sup> Under biopolitical conditions, in other words—these conditions in which subjects are "herded" or "shepherded" by the neopastoral practices of deregulation, privatization, incentivization, and marketization to survive only insofar as one and all manage to conduct their lives in a sufficiently entrepreneurial way—Foucault's "ethical turn" may be understood to yield nothing less than a paradigm of political resistance to the specific mode of pastoral power that confronted him in his own present.

On this read, we would be obliged to think again about the politics implied in the practice of philosophical truth-telling Foucault rediscovered, in the last years of his life, in the works of Euripides and Plato. This risky practice of courageous performative statements—the principled *carelessness* of the self the Greeks called *parrēsia*—consisted of speech unadorned by any rhetorical *technē*, political speech the utterance of which, Foucault noted, had the potential to place into question the very life of the speaker himself.<sup>61</sup> In these final lectures of his life, it would thus seem, the courage to tell the truth was already emerging within Foucault's thought as the name of a death-defying biopolitics—a counter-*dispositif* to the *thanatos* that is internal to and constitutive of neoliberalism, a mode of seriousness that could serve as a counterpoint to the compulsory play of the market. Truth-telling, that is to say, qualifies as one of many techniques that could link the care for the polity directly and essentially to the ethical task of living well.<sup>62</sup> Ethics, thought biopolitically, would not then be reducible to a matter of individual choice; it would make the political once again a qualifier of being. Especially if one rereads

Foucault's *La volonté de savoir* alongside his earlier work, and his *oeuvre* as such within the horizon of the Marxist critique of capitalism,<sup>63</sup> Foucault's thought on biopolitics doesn't then exemplify neoliberalism, so much as provide an interpretive key for its deciphering and dissolution.

### 3.

Without pretending this rereading of *La volonté de savoir* is in any way complete, let's nevertheless set down Foucault's book for a moment, in order to return to and clarify the premise of this exegesis. What we hope to have presented to the reader by tarrying with Foucault's text in this way is the unusual dynamic that seems to be at play in *La volonté de savoir*. In the very text that the biopolitical turn has converted into an *Urtext* for clarifying the relations between life and politics, the encounter between life and politics reveals itself not as *a relation* but as *a series of non-relations*. In *La volonté de savoir*, it seems to us, life and politics encounter one another mainly in and through a set of *generative aporias*—impasses that aren't merely "negative," but that in each case double as productive spaces, blind spots the very opacity of which doubles, paradoxically, as a source of insight. It's this strangely inviting unreadability that, in our view, helps explain the sheer repetition of the story Foucault tells, indeed the story's capacity, as it were, to get a "grip" or "hold" on Foucault's readers. In particular, we think it no accident that Foucault's text would incite so many readers to recite the story of biopolitics using the terms and tropes of theatre—in the form of what Foucault himself might have called a *theatrum philosophicum*.<sup>64</sup> Not least because the encounter between politics and life is, in genealogical terms, derived in part from the relation between the mask and the body,<sup>65</sup> it's understandable that Foucault's remarks on biopolitics should have been so consistently interpreted within the biopolitical turn with reference to the terms of familiar dramatic genres (such as tragedy, comedy, epic, and horror). For Aristotle, remember, poetics is the study of *plot*—it's the analysis of narrative twists and turns, of ironic reversals, of sudden recognitions and fateful mistakes and errors, and above all of events.<sup>66</sup> Impasses of the sort we have outlined in *La volonté de savoir* seem to us to provide the prior condition on which Foucault's text may be converted into a plot so defined: they seem to us to operate as so many hollow joints and empty sockets, so many open pivot points, the main function of which is, in turn, to allow readers to narrativize, using the familiar and recognizable terms of

existing genres, an encounter that's otherwise unrecognizable, that indeed has no genre of its own. It's with this in mind that we have collected the following readings. Each elaborates some element of Foucault's story; none exhausts it.

The first reading comes from that political philosopher who Foucault always seems to have read, who sometimes even seems to have read Foucault, and whose writings on life and politics are "biopolitical" in all but name.<sup>67</sup> Foucault's 1976 reflections on biopolitics, remember, taper off in an incomplete meditation on the strange way that life and law interrelate in modern politics. In modernity, Foucault argues, human needs, human potential, and human possibility became juridified: they became the rallying cry for a new revolutionary politics grounded in "the rights of man and of the citizen." But, Foucault observes, this happened at the same time that biopower was beginning to consolidate its mastery of the body through new regimes of power/knowledge. At the center of the "rights of man," Foucault suggests, is thus a curious impasse. The modern concept of life refers less to a single, stable essence, than to a set of continuously shifting norms (pertaining to health and welfare, safety and security) that measured a set of intrinsically limitless demands (you can never have enough safety or health, after all).<sup>68</sup> Because these norms and demands eluded the juridical forms that proposed to protect life (and, classically, law operated through stable definitions of clear limits), the "rights of man" could not materialize in the absence of very specific administrative apparatuses—apparatuses whose structures needed to be just as variable and expansive as the life they proposed to govern was unpredictable and unbounded. The result was that human life entered into law at the very moment that biopower "grasped" life as a series of indefinite, enigmatic processes, and handed life over to apparatuses of governmentality whose operation then quickly began to exceed law from within. The "rights of man," in other words, were declared at the precise moment when law lost touch with life.

As we know, Foucault would proceed to study this aporia from the interior of politics, by inquiring into the way that power gained access to life through the problematization of sexuality. Thirty years earlier, by contrast, Arendt already had studied a similar aporia—only from the exterior of politics. Writing in the midst of the refugee crisis that emerged in the wake of the Second World War, Arendt inquired into the aporia of human rights from the standpoint of the masses of "stateless people" who had been excluded from all legal protections except those of human rights. Originally published in 1951, a year

after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Arendt's reflections on "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man" circle around an insoluble impasse internal to that Declaration. The "stateless people" who at that time clearly were most in need of the protections of human rights were also those who were least likely to be protected by human rights. Because no right can be enforced outside of the horizon of an established political community, human rights were all but meaningless for populations who no longer belonged to any political community. And this, in turn, gave rise to the aporia that provoked Arendt's thought. At the very moment that the loss of their home qualified "stateless people" as "pure humans" (as humans in general, rather than as members of this or that particular political community, as "English" or "French"), their "human rights" no longer could be effectively invoked. The one subject to whom human rights in principle *ought to* apply—the abstract and naked human, the human being conceived in its most basic existential givenness—was therefore also the one subject to whom human rights *did not* and *could not* apply at all. The community of those who belonged to no other community except humanity as such, and who in principle should have been at the very center of all human rights, were therefore paradoxically excluded from any human rights. Like the declaration of the "rights of man" analyzed by Foucault, the human rights analyzed by Arendt were declared at the precise moment when law lost touch with life. In the thinking of both Foucault and Arendt (though in very different ways, and with much different corollaries<sup>69</sup>), *the inclusion of life within law* thus coincides with *the exclusion of life from law*.

In the selection from *The Human Condition* we reproduce here, meanwhile, Hannah Arendt inquires into another of the problematics of life and politics that Foucault would take up only much later. Her point of departure is a conceptual reversal that anticipates one of Foucault's own, but without also being reducible to it. For Arendt, the distinctive character of modern politics is exemplified by its productive mistranslation of Aristotle's formulation of the human: for the moderns, the human is not a "political animal" but rather a "social animal."<sup>70</sup> In Arendt's view, modern thought transposes to the political domains of action and work the concept of "necessity" that, for Aristotle, was the hallmark of the reproduction of life (through household labor and the labor of childbirth itself) and that, as such, was very antithesis of both action and work. The symptoms of this transposition of life onto politics, in Arendt's telling, include the disappearance of persuasion and freedom from

politics, the displacement of immortality by mortality as the central form for political historiography, and the emergence of violent techniques of government dictated by the “necessity” of defending society against its own potentialities of mortality and natality. In some ways, Arendt’s anxieties over modern politics seem to lead her to narrate the encounter of life and politics in the genre of a “horror story”: “life,” in Arendt’s rendering, often seems like a “blob” that is about to attack politics.<sup>71</sup> In other ways, however, Arendt’s criticisms of the modern reduction of politics to the safeguarding of life, her studies of the introduction of mortality into historiography, her inquiry into the concept of “sacred human life” as the residue of the secularization of salvation, and above all her thinking on the problems of birth and natality—all today seem to be so many oblique heralds of Foucault’s later, comparable inquiries. Understood in this manner, Arendt’s *Human Condition* provides a complementary response to the same general event—the same general problematization of life and politics—to which Foucault responded in *La volonté de savoir*: whereas Foucault’s text considers the problematization of life by politics, *The Human Condition* takes up the problematization of politics by life. And in this sense, the birth of biopolitics takes place in a way and at a site that—in true genealogical fashion—cuts against the origin stories that govern the biopolitical turn.

Following Arendt is a series of texts from the greatest contemporary divulgator of Foucault’s biopolitical narrative, and devoted reader of Arendt, Giorgio Agamben.<sup>72</sup> For Agamben, biopolitics is less a plotting of life and politics than a clue that points to the secret, inner link between modern democracy and its constitutive double: the totalitarian state. In Agamben’s rendering, the story of biopolitics is actually a continuing story about sovereignty, of “bare life” produced by the state of exception. More tragic than epic, the biopolitical for Agamben is not at all synonymous, as it is not only for Foucault but also for Arendt, with the emergence of modernity in and through the *overturning* of Aristotle. Rather it is coterminous with the whole of Western metaphysics *beginning with* Aristotle. Reworking Foucault’s reversals and chiasmic sleights of hand, Agamben offers the reader a single narrative of the adventures and misadventures of a single conceptual personæ: *homo sacer*, which Agamben, using precisely the language of classical poetics, calls “the protagonist” of his book.<sup>73</sup> This requires Agamben to appropriate Foucault’s text in a way that cuts sharply against Foucault’s answer to the question of precisely how, why, and when it was that life happened to become the object of



politics. Here, as elsewhere, the attentive reader shall have to be vigilant about the risk that unexamined assumptions derived from some or another unstated philosophy of history might predetermine our thinking about biopolitics. Indeed, as Jacques Derrida, among others, has shown, any rigorous inquiry into biopolitics can, and should, throw into question the basic concepts of the philosophy of history itself—up to and including the concept of the event.<sup>74</sup>

What goes for time holds for space as well. If, as Carlo Galli argues, every “political thought” is both grounded in and riven by an implicit “political space” that remains inaccessible to it,<sup>75</sup> then exactly what “political space” is it that stirs within Foucault’s remarks on biopolitics? Is it the European city, into which and out of which grain flows? The territory of the sovereign European state, as Foucault himself seems to suppose? The concentration camp, as Agamben proposes?<sup>76</sup> The “milieu” of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Jakob von Uexküll?<sup>77</sup> Or is Foucault’s thinking on biopolitics most notable for the way it seems to abandon any thought of space whatsoever?<sup>78</sup> How, in any case, might explicit reflection on that political space change the way we think of “biopolitics” itself? Taking up the figure of sovereignty and bare life produced by the state of exception, but now in the political space of the postcolony, Achille Mbembe merges Foucault’s right to take life and let live and Agamben’s discussion of *homo sacer*. The result is a distressing account of a new and different dimension to contemporary biopower: its function as *necropower*. Extending and intensifying Foucault’s arguably incomplete meditations on biopolitics and racism, Mbembe directs the reader’s attention to the way in which necropower functions to destroy persons by creating the rigidly striated spaces he calls “death-worlds.” This reading of biopolitics, which depends crucially on the thought of Georges Bataille, reveals an intolerable “expenditure of life” that becomes apparent when “death reveals the human subject’s animal side.” In that reference to the animal, Mbembe also gestures to a possible resolution of the massive negativity of necropower in trickery in ways that some readers may find deeply troubling. Mbembe’s text is followed by Warren Montag’s response in “Necro-economics: Adam Smith and Death in the Life of the Universal.” Montag too takes up Agamben’s figure of *homo sacer* as the subject of biopower to make an argument about the role of the negative in the market theology of Adam Smith. But where Mbembe focuses on savage and animal life in political spaces of siege and occupation, Montag moves the narrative of biopolitics up slightly to a moment in the thought of

Adam Smith, in order to rethink the concept now within the smooth space of the world market. His answer, despite its differences from Mbembe, is equally distressing. “The subsistence of a population may, and does in specific circumstances, require the death of a significant number of individuals; to be precise it requires that they be allowed to die so that others may live.”<sup>79</sup> Regardless of what the reader concludes from her examination of the Mbembe–Montag dispute, she should not fail to note something else: the way biopolitics functions in this dispute as a spur for the rereading of the foundational texts of modern political thought, in order to draw out their specifically biopolitical valences and sculpt them into optics for understanding our present.<sup>80</sup> This, we would submit, is another iteration of the remarkable way that biopolitics is the name for a certain technique of retelling. Not only is it the case that energy implicit in Foucault’s narrative spurs its own retelling; it is also the case that the energy from Foucault’s narrative spurs the retelling of certain familiar stories, such as the history of political thought.

For its part, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s rereading of Foucault stands at the polar opposite of Agamben’s. In the first of their texts we include here, a selection titled “Biopolitical Production” from their 2000 book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri interpret “the biopolitical nature of the new paradigm of power,” as a form of power “that regulates social life from its interior.” To do so they decisively shift the ultimate horizon for biopolitics and biopower to society and the social space in which life and politics encounter each other. As compelling as Foucault’s account is for a contemporary ontology of ourselves, they argue that Foucault failed to consider that the true shared object of biopolitics and disciplinarity is precisely society. By appropriating Deleuze’s notion of “societies of control” along with Foucault’s linking of biopower with capitalist subsumption at the end of the *ancien régime* as well as Agamben’s paradigm of biopolitics, Hardt and Negri believe they can account for the “intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices” in ways that Foucault, Deleuze, and Félix Guattari cannot.<sup>81</sup> The name they give to this new society of biopolitical control and right and paradigm of power is “Empire,” which they term “a milieu of the event.” Ten years later Hardt and Negri return to Foucault in a context of subjectivization and event by following out a distinction between biopolitics and biopower. In their account the intersection of life and politics is less a chiasmic encounter than an event that folds inside and outside. Biopolitics, as they read it, is a disruptive force that arrives

from the outside rupturing the continuity of history. At the same time the event on the inside appears as innovation and creation. Emphasizing the concept of “event” allows Hardt and Negri to shift the angle of vision away from the separation of life and politics, and to accentuate existence as an affirmative horizon for biopolitics today—a horizon that becomes especially clear once we achieve full theoretical self-consciousness about the kernels and fragments of secularized theological traditions that never ceased to animate the basic concepts of modern political reason in the first place. From this view, biopolitics is not then the name for a tragic plot according to which liberalism is permanently fated to retain the potential to revert to totalitarianism; it is narrativizable, to the contrary, as the experience of a new form of communism, one that bears almost no relation to the old bureaucratic communism of the twentieth century, and that, existing as it does in a state of permanent incipience, is utopian or even messianic in character.

Alongside these selections, we have included two texts, “Labor, Action, Intellect” and “An Equivocal Concept: Biopolitics” from Paolo Virno. Here we see Virno grappling with the ambiguity of Foucault’s story, especially the emphasis on modern man as animal by focusing on the linguistic experience of human beings. Elaborating a model of virtuosity as a response to biopower or what he prefers to call “labor-power,” Virno winds up focusing on the multitude’s “potential to produce, in which labor-power marks a future capacity for virtuosity, in language.” The difference between Hardt and Negri’s perspective on biopolitics and Virno’s really concerns their poetics. For Hardt and Negri, the general ground for their reading of biopolitics is a world in which the laughter of the multitude is meant to dissolve biopower, which ends, as most comedies do, with victory, in this case of the multitude’s fully extended subjectivization in the common. Virno’s outlook too is primarily comic with his emphasis on the self-assuredness of the virtuoso who keeps the upper hand over labor power. Often though the impression is something slightly more tragic, given the ease with which the general intellect manifests itself as a “hierarchical system, as a pillar of the production of surplus value.”<sup>82</sup>

The third section of readings opens with Donna Haraway’s classic essay “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse.” Haraway shows how deeply riven Foucault’s narrative is by what she sees as traditional forms of European humanism. In her posthuman response, she finds solace in imagining a biopolitical body whose immune system allows for increasing levels of contamination and hybridization.

Of particular interest is her notion that the immune system is a kind of practice that informs “the dialectics of western biopolitics,” one that operates as a Foucauldian apparatus able to produce bodies at the interstices of the normal and the pathological. This is no Agambenian production of the sacred or the profane given that any component in immune systems can be interfaced with any other. And yet despite the seemingly Dionysian overtones with which she writes of immunization, Haraway is less than sanguine about the ultimate possibilities for immunized, semi-permeable selves to overcome the “impossibilities of individuation and identification.”

German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk takes up Haraway’s immunized semi-permeable selves and extends them to the decadence of collective forms of life today. Associating the advent of biopower and biopolitics to what he calls the elaboration of *modus vivendi* under globalization, his reading of biopolitics is less a defense of communal forms of life and more a symptomology of the dissolution of self and place that has occurred under neo-liberalism. Sloterdijk offers what might be described as a biohistory of contemporary society in which ethnic definitions of nation-states function less and less as containers for collective life. In their place a wager ensues on the development of immunological designs capable of creating within these societies “permeable” or “thin” walls. Individuals are tasked with designing their own forms of immunity within these “societies.” Sloterdijk’s reading of biopower and globalization shares a number of points of contact with his earlier essay titled “Rules for the Human Zoo,” especially in his superimposition of forms of immunity with forms of habitation and domestication. Here though Sloterdijk more forcefully commemorates the end of communal life, while casting his gaze across the present future landscape of thin walls, empty places, and selves absented from social and personal identity.

Roberto Esposito also takes up immunity as a way of coming to terms with contemporary biopolitics, but rather than turning to the cyborg, he introduces the figures of incorporation and flesh as “the way of being in common of that which seeks to be immune.” The result is to show how the establishment of a biopolitical language across a number of different disciplines cannot be thought apart from that language’s explicitly communitarian connotations. In the second selection, Esposito sketches a genealogy of immunity in classic liberalism. On Esposito’s read immunization emerges as deeply constitutive of a liberal, political lexicon, which includes sovereignty, property, and liberty. Esposito doesn’t upend Foucault’s account of how life

becomes the object of the political so much as complement it; immunization is seen as the means by which biopolitics both protects and in some cases negates a commonly held life. In the second of two texts from Esposito, the Italian philosopher details further how biopolitics may be situated within the horizon of immunization. Of special importance is the role of the body for both sovereign power and biopower. Building on Foucault's ambiguous reading of the norm sketched in "Right of Power and Life over Death," Esposito argues that immunity and biopower in modernity have become co-terminous to the degree that immunization of living bodies often turns into self-destruction (of the body, but also of the body politic). Yet that isn't the entire story. Another narrative can be found in immunity's opening to community and to community's untapped power to produce norms in living bodies in such a way that non-normative norms appear. Esposito's notion of the common is clearly less indebted to political theology than that of Agamben to the degree it emerges out of a conflict that takes place between individual bodies and life itself. Such a conflict becomes the site on Esposito's read out of which newly emerging forms of life held in common become visible. Immunization, biopower, and the preservation of the body's borders become in Esposito's reading the mere specular image of a common capable of composing immanent singularities that do not move to protect or negate life.

The final group of readings is dedicated to those who either contest fundamentally Foucault's enjambment of life and politics, or who are attempting to shift our understanding of biopolitics as a way of returning to prior models of political action. Drawing out a much different Aristotle than the one illuminated by Arendt, Foucault, Agamben, or Virno, Alain Badiou rethinks the death in life that biopower instrumentalizes, treating it not as the mirror double of life, but as a positive principle, immortality. Here as elsewhere, Badiou moves beyond Nietzsche not by ignoring him but by turning Nietzschean thought against itself, pushing it past its own immanent horizon.<sup>83</sup> If for Nietzsche the problem of politics is how to breed an animal with the right to make promises,<sup>84</sup> for Badiou the problem of politics is how to make a promise—how to maintain a "fidelity"—in a way that carries the animal beyond any and all possible regimes of breeding.<sup>85</sup> For Badiou, the relation of life and politics entails a much different wager than the one named by Foucault. In a more recent text titled "What Is It to Live?," Badiou bookends the earlier piece by grappling with the migration of the qualifier "living" that we noted from the passage in "Power over Life." But rather than choosing to focus on

the living being, Badiou turns to the other reversal, namely “living worlds.” Here though Badiou concentrates on the temporal conditions under which a subject may be said to live, not in terms of reaction to some prior trauma, but rather a wager on the present and the subject’s possibility of incorporating the present into its own conditions of appearance: “Ultimately life is the wager, made on a body that has entered into appearing, that one will faithfully entrust this body with a new temporality, keeping at a distance the conservative drive (the ill-named ‘life’ instinct) as well as the mortifying drive (the death instinct).”<sup>86</sup> For Badiou, the relation of life and politics will be written in the present on the body as fragments of infinite truths.

Readers who are surprised to find Badiou’s texts included in this anthology no doubt also will be surprised to find our next reading, a little piece by Gilles Deleuze called “Immanence: A Life. . . .” Both texts are, to be sure, improbable selections: whereas Badiou’s essays polemicize against everything that seems to be even remotely associated with “biopolitics,” Deleuze’s essay seems not to address the question at all, devoting itself instead to an elaboration of what it means to live a life worthy of its events.<sup>87</sup> And yet despite the very different ways in which each text appears to swerve away from the biopolitical, both texts, especially when taken together, in fact cut to the very quick of the problem of biopolitics. To begin, both texts seek to emphasize the prior conditions on which it is possible to think “life” at all, anterior to its grasp by the non-teleological natural sciences, its politicization by *dispositifs* ancient and modern, or even its ontological capture in and by *technē*. Both texts then assert that “life” can only really emerge as a problem for thought within a horizon where the epistemological dyad of the subject and the object of knowledge—or, in Foucauldian language, the “transcendental-empirical couplet”—has dissolved, leaving in its place an experience that is precisely “impersonal.” Both texts show, furthermore, how “life” as we usually experience and think it is non-identical with itself, so that it is almost impossible to think “life itself” without recourse to terms other than “life” (such as, for example, “*technē*” or “politics”). And both, finally, bring to the absolute center of philosophic inquiry a problem—the event—that otherwise stirs only latently in all writing on biopolitics. For all of these reasons, the mere absence of the word “biopolitics” from these texts should not distract us from perceiving the much more fundamental sense in which each text *radicalizes* the problematization of life and politics that silently animated Foucault’s *La volonté de savoir*. Indeed, if these texts do not appear, at least on first glance, to be concerned

with “biopolitics,” this is simply because each takes the thought of biopolitics to such an extreme that each ends up exceeding “biopolitics” from within, passing beyond it on its own terms. To be sure, both Badiou and Deleuze do this in directions that are fundamentally opposed to one another—with Deleuze trying to think life on its own terms, in its absolute immanence, without any recourse to any exteriority whatsoever, and Badiou attempting to think life from the standpoint of a pure exteriority, an infinity and immortality so absolute that its essence can be grasped only with reference to mathematics. But for this very reason, these are two texts that are essential for any and all problematizations of life and politics. Precisely in the extremity of their opposition, the selections by Deleuze and Badiou bring into full view just how difficult, and yet also how indispensable, it has become, after Foucault, to answer a classical philosophic question: What does it mean to live? Read side by side, as a single disjunctive synthesis, these texts demarcate the outermost antipodes that together define the interior of the biopolitical field.

In Slavoj Žižek’s reading, meanwhile, much as in the reading we have already summarized by Rancière, the biopolitical stands in for a particularly resistant form of postpolitics, which appears as nothing other than a new form of master (and mastery) in which any “higher causes” of the political are made subservient to only one: life as transcendence. Žižek’s essay is both a devastating critique of capitalist ethics, which tries to hide its rapacity and homicidal work under cover of a discourse of human rights, as well as a broadside against Foucault and, more specifically, Agamben’s biopolitical paradigm. Of particular interest in the story of the life’s encounter with the political is Žižek’s insistence that the subject produced by apparatuses of knowledge-power also produces a remainder that evades and resists the very apparatuses that produce the subject. The power of biopolitics can be found according to Žižek in its ability to produce a subject that holds within the “agent of its own containment,” and hence is able to block an opening to the political as a negative. Such an operation of containment for Žižek must be resisted. Sharing points of contact with Hardt and Negri’s perspective on production along with Badiou’s on immortality, Žižek’s essay reminds us of the effects of the biopolitical on the autonomy of the political.

Even, especially, in this third group of readings, however, the relation of life and politics remains a problem for thought: not despite but because of the way these texts seek to expose the limits of the Foucaultian problematization of “biopolitics,” they are worthy of the reader’s close and careful attention. If,

as Hegel argues, the essence of a thing can only be understood with reference to its limit, then no account of “biopolitics” will be complete until it encounters these texts.<sup>88</sup> These texts too, after all, as Badiou’s reference to Aristotle shows, derive from the same problematic that concerned Foucault. Speaking of the good, Aristotle writes:

Will not the knowledge of it [the good] then have a great influence on life [*bion*]? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is object. It would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art. And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a polity.<sup>89</sup>

From start to finish, the texts gathered together here allow for study of just this sort—but with an essential twist. The point of re-reading biopolitics today is not, of course, to master or resolve the opacities of these texts. It’s to adjust your eyesight to the darkness of the opacities themselves, so as to take aim yourself at the mark whose absence is the common feature of each and all of them. Life, politics—to dwell on this encounter today is to discern that strangest of marks, this mark that is intimately yours without also being yours alone, this question mark that governs the one who lives, but who has not yet learned how to live.

## Notes

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1. On modern man as a “prosthetic God,” see Sigmund Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, ed. J. Strachey et al. (London: Hogart Press, 1953–74), 91–92. On the “negation of death,” see Nishitani Osamu, “The Wonderland of ‘Immortality,’” in *Contemporary Japanese Thought*, ed. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 131–156. On the “singularity,” see Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: The Viking Press, 2005).
2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, tome 1: *La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1976). We draw a distinction between



- Foucault's first analysis of biopolitics and his first utterance of the word "biopolitics." The latter took place in his October 1974 lecture on "the birth of social medicine." See, on this point, Marc Schuilenburg and Sjoerd van Tuinen, "Michel Foucault: Biopolitiek en Bestuurlijkheid," *Krisis: Tijdschrift voor actuele filosofie* 3:1 (2009), 3.
3. See, for example, Leo Bersani, review of *The Subject of Power*, *diacritics* 7:3 (Autumn 1977), esp. 3–6; Edith Kurzweil, review of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, *Theory and Society* 8:3 (November 1979), 422–425; Marcus Rediker, review of *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 36:4 (October 1979), 637–640.
  4. In his 1993 summary of *La Volonté de savoir*, for example, Foucault's biographer David Macey remains almost completely silent on "biopolitics," focusing instead on the "repressive hypothesis" and on the concept of the *dispositif*, which he calls "the text's major theoretical innovation." See David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 354–358.
  5. Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1:1 (1989), 3–43; Donna Haraway, "The Bio-politics of a Multicultural Field," *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 244–275.
  6. Étienne Balibar, "Foucault and Marx: The Question of Nominalism," in *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 38–56; Paul Gilroy, "'After the Love Has Gone': Bio-Politics and Etho-Poetics in the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 7 (1994), 49–76; Anne Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); and *Biopolitics: The Politics of the Body, Race and Nature*, ed. Agnes Heller, Sonja Puntischer Riekmann, and Ferenc Fehér (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996).
  7. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
  8. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
  9. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9–10.
  10. Balibar, "Foucault and Marx," 55. Nowhere is this symptom more acute than in the response to the biopolitical turn found in Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, "Biopower Today," *BioSocieties* 1:2 (2006), 195–217.
  11. See, for example, *La biopolitica: Il potere sulla vita e la costituzione di soggettività*, ed. Pierandrea Amato (Milan: Associazione Culturale Mimesis, 2004); *Biopolitica: storia e attualità di un concetto*, ed. Antonella Cutro (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2005); Laura Bazzicalupo, "Biopolitica," in *Enciclopedia del pensiero politico: autori, concetti, dottrine*, ed. Roberto Esposito and Carlo Galli (Roma-Bari: Gius, Laterza, and Figli, 2005), 79–81; Gabriel Giorgi and Fermín Rodríguez, *Ensayos sobre biopolítica: excesos de vida* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2007); Thomas Lemke, *Gouvernementalität und Biopolitik* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007); Francesco D'Agostino, *Introduzione alla biopolitica: Dodici voci fondamentali* (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2009); Schuilenburg and van

- Tuinen, "Michel Foucault: Biopolitiek en Bestuurlijkheid," 1–5; Laura Bazzicalupo, *Biopolitica: Una Mappa Concettuale* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2010); Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, trans. Eric Trump (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
12. Jacques Rancière, "The Difficult Legacy of Michel Foucault," *Chronicles of Consensual Times*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum Press, 2010), 127. With this criticism of Foucault, we note, Rancière is not far from the polemic directed against Foucault by Jean Baudrillard in his March 1977 response to *La Volonté de savoir*. There Baudrillard speaks of the "seduction" of Foucault's writing, which in Baudrillard's view "mirrors" the very powers it purports to describe. See Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, trans. Phil Beitchman et al. (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext[e], 2007), 29–30.
  13. Warren Montag, "Toward a Conception of Racism without Race: Foucault and Contemporary Biopolitics," *Pli* 13 (2002), 124.
  14. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986), 11.
  15. *Ibid.*, 96.
  16. Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault," *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth; Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1998), 117.
  17. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 142.
  18. *Ibid.*, 142.
  19. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 20–30, 60–1, 77–78; Foucault, "La vie: l'expérience et la science," *Dits et écrits, 1954–1988, Tome IV: 1980–1988*, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 774. Compare Gilles Deleuze, "L'immanence: une vie . . .," *Deux régimes de fous: textes et entretiens, 1975–1995*, ed. David Lapoujade (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003), 363.
  20. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 143.
  21. Gil Anidjar, "The Meaning of Life," *Critical Inquiry* 37:4 (Summer 2011), 701, 710.
  22. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 313–20; Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
  23. On the organism as machine, see Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 212–236; Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas. La protezione e negazione della vita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 136 (translated into English by Zakiya Hanafi as *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* [London: Polity Press, 2011]).
  24. See, in general, Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149–182; and, more generally, *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (New York: Routledge, 1995).
  25. Esposito, *Immunitas*, 170–172.
  26. In such a view biohistory "would no longer be the unitary and mythological history of the human species through time" since population emerges as a collection of

- genetic variations (Michel Foucault, "Bio-histoire et bio-politique," in *Dits et écrits, 1954–1988, Tome III: 1976–1979*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald [Paris: Gallimard, 1994], 97).
27. Part Four of *La volonté de savoir*, which is rendered in English as "The Deployment of Sexuality," is in French, titled "Le dispositif de sexualité."
  28. On the notion of dispositif, see Gilles Deleuze, "What is a *Dispositif*?" in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 159–169; Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1–24; Roberto Esposito, "The *Dispositif* of the Person," trans. Timothy Campbell, *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 8:1 (February 2012), 17–30.
  29. Michel Foucault, "Confessions of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194–196.
  30. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 144.
  31. Ibid., 143. The English translation of *La volonté de savoir* elides the term "biological" as a descriptor of threshold.
  32. "Enjeu," it is worth noting, is the French title of the chapter in *La volonté de savoir* that in *The History of Sexuality* is translated simply as "Objective."
  33. See, on this point, the conclusion to Foucault's first lecture on the abnormal: "I would like to try to study this appearance, this emergence of techniques of normalization and the powers linked to them by taking as a principle . . . that these techniques of normalization . . . are not simply the effect of the combination of medical knowledge and judicial power, of their composition or their plugging of each into the other, but a certain type of power—distinct from both medical and judicial power . . . It is a type of power that finally ends up in the courtroom" (Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974–1975*, trans. Graham Burchell [New York: Picador, 2003], 25–26).
  34. Put differently, biopolitics does not exist as a simple "object" of knowledge or action. Its mode of existence is rather that of a subject relating its life to itself as the central objective of any possible life in common. See, on this point, Emilio Raimondi, "Sei frammenti aporetici sulla biopolitica (con qualche resto)," in *La biopolitica*, ed. Amato, 184.
  35. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 142–143. The translation of "*la prise*" as "mastery" and "taking charge of" is off the mark. The distinction between sovereignty's "transcendent" relation to life "from above," and biopower's "hold" on life "from within" life itself, is lost in translation. An additional problem is presented by the term "mastery," which is close to "sovereignty," and so seems to continue in precisely the domain, biopolitics, that Foucault seems to take as its limit.
  36. Esposito's perspective on the limits of Foucauldian biopolitics is useful to keep in mind here. "Precisely because he is able to describe the genealogical mechanisms of modern society so thoroughly and extensively, he runs the risk of remaining hermeneutically imprisoned in its dynamics, and thus losing, or at least failing to fully grasp, the limit point at which modernity comes face to face with its outside: the moment, that is, when

- the differential margins that for centuries separated and juxtaposed the domains of the real and the imaginary, the natural and the artificial, the organic and the inorganic, finally explode or implode" (Esposito, *Immunitas*, 175).
37. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event 2*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2010), 35.
  38. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 234–238.
  39. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 273.
  40. Ibid., 273.
  41. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 143.
  42. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 277.
  43. Compare, on this point, Deleuze's reading of Bergsonism: "Life as *movement* alienates itself in the material form that it creates: by actualizing itself, by differentiating itself, it loses 'contact with the rest of itself.' Every species is thus an arrest of movement" (Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam [New York: Zone Books, 1991], 104).
  44. See, on this score, Heidegger's distinction between the essence of animality and the essence of humanity which consists in "the living character of a living being, as distinct from the non-living being," namely the possibility of dying (Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 179). Jacques Derrida's gloss of Heidegger's reading is significant: "the animal doesn't die," but "stops living" (Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills [New York: Fordham University Press, 2008], 154).
  45. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 273.
  46. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 137.
  47. Ibid., 137.
  48. See, on this point, Jacques Derrida, "'To Do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, *Critical Inquiry* 20:2 (Winter, 1994), 227–266.
  49. "Just as the disciplinary type of power existed in medieval societies, in which schemas of sovereignty were nevertheless present, so too, I think, forms of the power of sovereignty can still be found in contemporary society. Where do we find them? Well, I would find them in the only institution . . . that I have not yet spoken about . . . I mean the family. I was going to say that the family is a remnant, but this is not entirely the case. At any rate, it seems to me that the family is a sort of cell within which the power exercised is not, as one usually says, disciplinary, but rather of the same type as the power of sovereignty" (Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France*, trans. Graham Burchell [New York: Palgrave, 2006], 79).
  50. Étienne Balibar, "Racism Revisited: Sources, Relevance, and Aporias of a Modern Concept," *PMLA* 123:5 (October 2008), 1630.
  51. Étienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso Books, 1991), 38.
  52. Montag, "Racism without Race," 122–124.

53. Étienne Balibar, "Outlines of a Topography of Cruelty: Citizenship and Civility in the Era of Global Violence" in *We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 126.
54. See, on this point, Alain Badiou, "Foucault: Continuity and Discontinuity," in *Adventures in French Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Verso Books, 2012), 99 (arguing that "it is impossible to find in Foucault an affirmative doctrine of politics").
55. See also, on this point, Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).
56. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
57. Montag, "Racism without Race," 124.
58. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 226.
59. Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms," *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 3, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 2000), 17.
60. As Foucault argued in 1978, "[t]here have been anti-feudal revolutions; there has never been an anti-pastoral revolution. The pastorate has not yet experienced the process of profound revolution that would have definitively expelled it from history" (Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 150).
61. Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 62, 315, 318.
62. Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 260. Compare Badiou, "Foucault: Continuity and Discontinuity," 89 (arguing that Foucault's genealogical studies of the 1970s were leading him in the direction of "philosophy as wisdom, as leading 'the good life'").
63. See, for example, Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 5–9.
64. Michel Foucault, "Theatrum philosophicum," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 196.
65. See, for example, Giorgio Agamben, "Comedy," in *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1–22; Roberto Esposito, *Third Person: Politics of Life and Philosophy of the Impersonal*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012); and Giorgio Agamben, "Identity Without the Person," in *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 46–54.
66. Aristotle, "Poetics," trans. I. Bywater, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2321–2332, esp. 2322–2323 (Book 9).
67. The sense in which Hannah Arendt is a thinker of "biopolitics" is clarified by Miguel Vatter, "Nativity and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt," *Revista de Ciencia Política* 26:2 (2006), 137–159; Kathrin Braun, "Biopolitics and Temporality in Arendt and Foucault,"

- Time and Society* 16:1 (2007), 5–23; and Claire Blencowe, “Foucault’s and Arendt’s ‘Insider View’ of Biopolitics: A Critique of Agamben,” *History of the Human Sciences* 23 (2010), 113–130. Foucault’s own mentions of Arendt are notably scant. See, for example, Michel Foucault, “Politics and Ethics: An Interview,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 378–379.
68. Foucault, “The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Power*, 98–99.
69. Given the limited aims of this introduction, we set aside the intricate problem of Arendt’s aporetic declaration that “there is only one human right” (*Es gibt nur ein einziges Menschenrecht*): the “right to have rights.” For more on this formulation, the reader may consult the detailed secondary literature focused on it, including but not limited to Étienne Balibar, “(De)Constructing the Human as Human Institution: A Reflection on the Coherence of Hannah Arendt’s Practical Philosophy,” *Social Research* 74:3 (Fall 2007), 727–738; Christoph Menke, “The ‘Aporias of Human Rights’ and the ‘One Human Right’: Regarding the Coherence of Hannah Arendt’s Argument,” Trans. Birgit Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele, *Social Research* 74:3 (Fall 2007), 739–762; Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Press, 2007); and Ayten Gündoğdu, “‘Perplexities of the Rights of Man’: Arendt on the Aporias of Human Rights,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 11:1 (January 2012), 4–24.
70. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 23; but cf. Vatter, “Nativity and Biopolitics,” 147.
71. See, on this point, Hanna Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt’s Concept of the Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). The genre of the horror story is not uncommon among thinkers who write on life. See, on this point, Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1–24.
72. For Agamben’s expression of gratitude to Arendt, see “Letter from Giorgio Agamben to Hannah Arendt, 21 Feb. 1970,” *diacritics* 39:4 (Winter 2009), 111.
73. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6.
74. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 333.
75. Carlo Galli, *Political Spaces and Global War*, trans. Elisabeth Fay, ed. Adam Sitze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 4–8.
76. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 166–180.
77. For Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s use of the term “milieu,” see his *Zoological Philosophy: An Exposition with Regard to the Natural History of Animals*, trans. Hugh Eliot (London: Macmillan, 1914); cf. Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with a Theory of Meaning*, trans. Joseph D. O’Neil (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). A helpful summary of milieu’s meanings can be found in Margo Huxley’s “Spatial Rationalities: Order, Environment, Evolution and Government,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 7:5 (October 2006), 771–787.
78. See, on this point, Stuart Elden, “Governmentality, Calculation, Territory,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25:3 (2007), 562–580; Raimondi, “Sei frammenti aporetici sulla biopolitica,” 186–190.
79. Warren Montag, “Necro-economics: Adam Smith and Death in the Life of the Universal,” in *Radical Philosophy* 134 (November–December 2005), 14.

80. See also, for example, Melinda Cooper's rereading of Aristotle in "The Living and the Dead: Variations on *de Anima*," *Angelaki* 7:3 (2002), 81–104; Nishitani Osamu's rereading of Hegel, Heidegger, and Levinas in "The Wonderland of 'Immortality'"; Eugene Thacker's rereading of Aristotle and Kant in *After Life*; and Miguel Vatter's rereading of Nietzsche in "Eternal life and Biopower," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 10:3 (2010), 217–249.
81. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992), 3–7.
82. Paolo Virno, *The Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2002), 66.
83. See, for example, Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Norman Madarasz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 99–101, 121.
84. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 57–60.
85. See especially Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York: Verso Books, 2001), 4–7, 40–57.
86. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 589.
87. For the contrary reading, see Giorgio Agamben, "Pure Immanence," in *Potentialities: Collected Essay in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 220–239; Esposito, *Third Person*, 142–151.
88. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 126.
89. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, p. 1729 (1094a 19), translation modified.