School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

Autoimmune Interventions: Between (Bio)deconstruction and (Bio)politics

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Abstract

This thesis puts forward a reinterpretation of the political significance of Jacques Derrida's concept of autoimmunity. This is prompted by what appears to be a new turn in deconstructive inquiry, biodeconstruction, as it regards the relationship of Derrida's work to the life sciences, and in particular, the claim that the investigation of life is not merely a recurring thematic in deconstruction but its very matrix. In the wake of these developments, this thesis sets out to speculate on the political consequences of this reorientation of deconstruction through the concept of autoimmunity. From the outset, I posit that autoimmunity is a key term for establishing the political significance of reading deconstruction as a philosophy of life. Beginning from this perspective, I ask whether treating deconstruction as an investigation of life can be shown to have any political consequences—and, on the way, to ask whether it can be shown to make any *particular* politics possible or indeed preferable. Revisiting, in light of the logic of autoimmunity, the historical debate regarding deconstruction's normative force, and finding that the generalisation of Derrida's logic of autoimmunity cannot fully guarantee a set of normative political principles, the thesis turns to investigate the effects of the logic of autoimmunity as they appear in and through theorisations of biopolitics, particularly in the work of Judith Butler, Roberto Esposito, and Hannah Arendt. My argument, as it develops throughout the thesis, is that autoimmunity shows us that nothing is *a priori* immune from politicisation, which instead remains available wherever moments of natality and invention come to surprise and interrupt us—even in the private realm, the world of non-human life, the age of the *animal laborans*, or indeed even in the work of biodeconstruction. Autoimmunity, that is, always serves to multiply the possibilities for what kinds of thought and action such contexts might enable.

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Introduction

This thesis puts forward a reinterpretation of the political significance of Jacques Derrida's concept of autoimmunity, prompted by what appears to be a new turn in deconstructive inquiry, biodeconstruction, as it regards the relationship of Derrida's work to the life sciences. While plenty of engagements with deconstruction and the life sciences precede this turn—or perhaps have precipitated it, and the name of "biodeconstruction" has arrived only belatedly—what is particularly provocative about this developing genre in deconstruction is the claim put forward by Francesco Vitale (2018, 1), that "the investigation of *life*" is not merely a recurring thematic in deconstruction, but rather its "very matrix." Accordingly, "biodeconstruction"—both the discursive frame as well as Vitale's book of the same name—develops the thesis that deconstruction has *always* been biodeconstruction (Naas 2019, 14). As such, the work of biodeconstruction sets out to reread deconstruction as, from the start, a philosophy of life.

In the wake of these developments, this thesis sets out to speculate on the political consequences of this reorientation of deconstruction through the concept of autoimmunity. From the outset, I posit that autoimmunity, as both a particularly significant term in both Derrida's work on the political and a term that Derrida borrows from the biological sciences, is a key term for establishing the political significance of reading deconstruction as a philosophy of life. For this reason, the first two chapters are dedicated to interpreting autoimmunity from this perspective; firstly, reading it in relation to the life of the living being, as a term borrowed (whether inappropriately or prophetically) from the biological sciences, and secondly, as both a promise and threat to collective life. Having established this

interpretation of autoimmunity, the thesis turns to the questions of whether the concept can be seen to harbour any normative implications, and whether we can develop a politics on its basis. The final chapters address what meaning politics might take on in light of the necessarily transformative concept of autoimmunity developed throughout the thesis.

The work undertaken here can only be considered "biodeconstructive" in a limited sense. I do not set out to "show metaphysics at work in the heart of biological discourse" nor to "deconstruct that metaphysical definition of life" (Basile 2019, 175), even though, to an extent, this deconstruction nonetheless takes place, particularly in chapters 1 and 2. Additionally, despite the debt that the thesis owes to Francesco Vitale's *Biodeconstruction*, that text is itself rarely my subject. While ultimately I question the primacy that he grants to the biological sources of autoimmunity, I am led to do so by beginning with, and taking seriously, his thesis that life is deconstruction's matrix. Put differently, I take biodeconstruction (and *Biodeconstruction*) as the catalyst to speculate on what biodeconstruction has, for the most part, situated as outside of, or secondary to, the life of the living being—the political.

My argument, as it develops throughout the thesis, is that autoimmunity shows us that nothing is *a priori* immune from politicisation. The final chapter develops a reading of Hannah Arendt's natality as a nonsynonymous substitute for autoimmunity that suggests that her account, despite her explicit exclusion of biological life from the political realm, might also be seen to demonstrate a certain weakness or proclivity for action everywhere, including in the apparently passive, immutable, and labouring aspects of life. If natality can be understood, as I argue it can, as the autoimmune tendency that affects the political, opening it up to other possibilities for a form and sense of politics that remain to be invented, its effects cannot therefore be delimited to any particular context or environment. Having begun from the biodeconstructive position that life is deconstruction's "matrix," and that the critical questions regarding democracy and the political that deconstruction raises are therefore conditioned by autoimmunity as biologically and structurally constitutive of the living being (see Vitale 2018, 171), we find that the distinction no longer really holds. Or rather, that the drawing of the distinction is itself a performative act. The germ of biodeconstruction, having now been introduced, is available like any natal act to be

inherited, critiqued, and relaunched otherwise. It may be the case that I have done so partially, incompletely, and unfaithfully. But if this thesis offers something novel to the field of "Derrida studies," it will not be, say, my confirmation (yet again) that we cannot derive an authoritative ethics or politics from rereading Derrida in light of biodeconstruction. Rather, it will lie in the argument that we can open up new possibilities for politics by rereading *biodeconstruction*.

1 Autoimmunity, Properly Speaking

The term *autoimmunity* in Jacques Derrida's lexicon is most well-known as the name for a certain suicidal tendency or death-drive at the heart of democracy, community, and religion. Introduced in the early 1990s, first, briefly, in *Specters of Marx* (2006, 177; Fr. 1993) and *Politics of Friendship* (2005b, translated as "self-immunity," 76; Fr. 1994), and elaborated in "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone" (2002a, 40–102), "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides" (2003), and *Rogues* (2005c), autoimmunity marks and accompanies Derrida's taking up of an explicitly political theme in his later works. Despite Derrida's claim that his appropriation of autoimmunity takes place "in order to situate the question of life and of the living being, of life and death, of life-death, at the heart of [his] remarks" (Derrida 2005c, 123), until recently, autoimmunity's meaning in relation to the living being in his work has largely gone unquestioned. Rather, insofar as autoimmunity's proper context in Derrida's oeuvre appears to be *political*, particularly through his most extended writings on the subject, autoimmunity is taken to operate within the extended metaphor of the body politic (Lucy 2015, 147), offering an insight into so many apparently degenerative and suicidal traits of modern democracy (see e.g. Campbell 2006, 9–10). But Derrida's assertion that the question of "life and of the living being, of life and death, of life-death" lies at the heart of his use of autoimmunity has more recently begun to be taken seriously, particularly since the publication of the *Life Death* seminars (Derrida 2020). As Michael Naas puts it, "after periods in which Derrida criticism focused on 'Derrida and Phenomenology,' 'Derrida and Literature,' 'Derrida and Religion,' and so on," another burgeoning genre of deconstructive criticism "promises to bring Derrida's work to bear on important contemporary debates about the nature of life, the relationship between

life and technology, between the life sciences and the human sciences, even debates around genetic testing, the ethics of cloning, and so on" (Naas 2019, 13). The publication in 2018 of Francesco Vitale's *Biodeconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, while it is certainly not the first engagement with deconstruction and life, is a significant marker in this new genre, with special issues of *CR: The New Centennial Review* and *Postmodern Culture* dedicated to considering its implications. Central to its promise, and setting it apart from those earlier engagements with Derrida's oeuvre and the topics of ecology, ethography, biotechnology and cybernetics, immunology, pharmacology, and more besides,[1] is the claim that "the investigation of *life*" is not merely a recurring thematic or mere "*issue*" in deconstruction but rather "the latter's very *matrix*" (Vitale 2018, 1; emphasis mine). *Biodeconstruction* accordingly both calls for, and performs, the work of rereading deconstruction *as* biodeconstruction from the start, developing the thesis that deconstruction has always been, in some sense, a philosophy of life.

Autoimmunity has been central to this reevaluation, even though it is far from the only term that Derrida borrows from the biomedical sciences. Indeed, and as Vitale convincingly demonstrates in *Biodeconstruction*, Derrida's references to biology throughout his oeuvre are extensive, and can be seen as far back as his earliest works, as is especially clear in *Of Grammatology* (1997b; Fr. 1967). In two separate interviews published in the 1990s—"The Rhetoric of Drugs" (1995b, 228–54) and "The Spatial Arts" (1994)—Derrida characterises deconstruction *itself* in terms of contagion and infection:

> All I have done, to summarize it very reductively, is dominated by the thought of a virus, what could be called a parasitology, a virology, the virus being many things… The virus is a parasite that destroys, that introduces disorder into communication. Even from the biological standpoint, this is what happens with a virus; it derails a

[1] As nothing more than an indication of the breadth of such inquiry and its themes, a non-comprehensive list of these engagements before and concurrent with the publication of *Biodeconstruction* would include Robert Briggs, "Wild Thoughts: A Deconstructive Environmental Ethics?" (2001); David Wood, "Specters of Derrida: On the Way to Econstruction" (2007); Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (2008); Vicki Kirby, "Tracing Life: 'La Vie La Mort' " (2009) and *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (2011); Kelly Oliver, *Technologies of Life and Death: From Cloning to Capital Punishment* (2013); David Wills, *Inanimation: Theories of Inorganic Life* (2016); the volume *Eco-Deconstruction: Derrida and Environmental Philosophy* (2018), edited by Matthias Fritsch, Philippe Lynes, and David Wood and published the same month as *Biodeconstruction*; and Philippe Lynes, *Futures of Life Death on Earth: Derrida's General Ecology* (2018), published later the same year.

> mechanism of the communicational type, its coding and decoding. On the other hand, it is something that is neither living nor nonliving; the virus is not a microbe. And if you follow these two threads, that of a parasite which disrupts destination from the communicative point of view—disrupting writing, inscription, and the coding and decoding of inscription—and which on the other hand is neither alive nor dead, you have the matrix of all that I have done since I began writing. (Derrida 1994, 12)

> "Deconstruction" is always attentive to this indestructible logic of parasitism. As a discourse, deconstruction is always a discourse about the parasite, itself a device parasitic on the subject of the parasite, a discourse "on parasite" and in the logic of the "super-parasite." (Derrida 1995b, 234)

But autoimmunity appears to be especially significant in the rereading of Derrida's oeuvre in the frame of life. To be sure, this can be attributed at least in part to the fact that it is a late addition to Derrida's "ongoing rhetoric of contamination" (Mitchell 2017, 77). But more significantly, in these texts, Derrida frequently appears to assimilate concepts from his earlier work into this lexicon—such as the *pharmakon* (Derrida 2003, 124), *différance* (2005c, 39), autoaffection (2005c, 109), or autobiography (2008, 47)—giving the impression that autoimmunity is a final name for a logic that persists throughout the entirety of his works, giving credence to the claim that deconstruction has been, all along, an interrogation of life.

Vitale dedicates an entire chapter of *Biodeconstruction* to the matter of autoimmunity. According to Vitale, autoimmunity can be understood as "a consistent development of the seminar *La vie la mort* and thus as a further articulation of différance (life/death) as the genetico-structural condition of the living" (Vitale 2018, 168). He pursues a reading of Derrida's autoimmunity alongside the work of Jean-Claude Ameisen, arguing that "to understand the bearing of this lexicon and its extension to the religious, the political, democracy and sovereignty, we should go back to the biological sources of autoimmunity" (Vitale 2018, 3). For Vitale, this is a matter of the utmost importance, not only because it reveals "an astonishing congruence" (Naas 2019, 24) between Ameisen's work on cellular suicide—which was certainly not the mainstream view of autoimmunity in its time—and Derrida's autoimmunity. But more than that, for Vitale, going back to autoimmunity's

biological sources is essential insofar as, he argues, autoimmunity takes place as a "structural and biological condition of the constitution of the living self," whose effects "are *propagated* beyond the living self throughout the processes of the identitarian constitution elaborated by the living self on a level that is no longer 'natural' but 'cultural' " (Vitale 2018, 171; emphasis mine). "Therefore," he writes, it "also conditions democracy and the political, understood as 'cultural' products of the living" (Vitale 2018, 172). Put differently, autoimmunity's effects on the political—as in Derrida's discussions of democracy in *Rogues*, or terror in "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides"—are after-effects, the issue of autoimmunity's reproduction beyond the living organism. If this is indeed the case, perhaps by beginning from autoimmunity's relation to organic life we will be in a better position to understand not only Derrida's assertion of an autoimmunity of life "*in general*" beyond "natural" or "genetic" life, but its political consequences.

But Derrida's use of the term diverges from its most prevalent uses in the biomedical sciences—both at the time of Derrida's writing and now—as well as its vernacular usage, as Vitale does not fail to note (Vitale 2018, 168). In one of his earliest uses of the term, in "Faith and Knowledge," Derrida provides in a footnote a sketch of his use of autoimmunity:

> The "immune" (*immunis*) is freed or exempted from the charges, the service, the taxes, the obligations (*munus*, root of the common of community). This freedom or this exemption was subsequently transported into the domains of constitutional or international law (parliamentary or diplomatic immunity), but it also belongs to the history of the Christian Church and to canon law; the immunity of temples also involved the inviolability of the asylum that could be found there… It is especially in the domain of biology that the lexical resources of immunity have developed their authority. The immunitary reaction protects the "indemnity" of the body proper in producing antibodies against foreign antigens. As for the process of auto-immunization, which interests us particularly here, it consists for a living organism, as is well known and in short, of protecting itself against its own self-protection by destroying its own immune system. As the phenomenon of these antibodies is extended to a broader zone of pathology and as one resorts increasingly to the positive virtues of immuno-depressants destined to limit the mechanisms of rejection and to facilitate the tolerance of certain organ transplants, we feel ourselves

> authorized to speak of a sort of general logic of auto-immunization. It seems indispensable to us today for thinking the relations between faith and knowledge, religion and science, as well as the duplicity of sources in general. (Derrida 2002a, 80n27)

As others have recently noted (Anderson 2014, 613; Andrews 2011, 190; A. Timár 2015, n.p.; E. Timár 2014, 41; 2017, 66), Derrida's gloss of autoimmunity in the biomedical sciences is arguably erroneous; at the least, it conflates a number of immunitary phenomena which are not, strictly speaking, autoimmune, under the heading of autoimmunity. Andrea Timár argues that many have failed to recognise this fact in reading Derrida; that while "autoimmunity," at least in colloquial usage, refers to an organism's immune system damaging or destroying the organism's constituent parts, i.e., those parts that are not *of* the immune system, Derrida's account of autoimmunity describes an attack on "its own self-protection," which is to say the immune system "itself" (A. Timár 2015, n.p.). Hence, also, Derrida's reference to the "positive virtues of immuno-depressants" (Derrida 2002a, 80n27): autoimmunity is for Derrida a kind of auto-immuno-suppression. Such a contradiction leads Warwick Anderson to speculate that Derrida may have been thinking of AIDS; one early hypothesis "had proposed—wrongly, as it turned out—that some immunological process was destroying the body's T lymphocytes," although by the time of writing of "Faith and Knowledge," AIDS was already most commonly understood not as a kind of exceptional autoimmune disease, but to have been caused by HIV, a fact Derrida is aware of, evidenced by his brief reference to HIV therein (Anderson 2014, 613; Derrida 2002a, 62n17).

However, as Eszter Timár points out, the conclusion that Derrida has made a fundamental mistake can be attributed at least partly to our "colloquial conflation of 'autoimmunity' and 'autoimmune disease' " (E. Timár 2017, 67–68). She distinguishes two possible interpretations of Derrida's explanatory note, which hinge on the "ambiguous reference to 'the phenomenon of antibodies' " (E. Timár 2017, 67–68). Pertinent to this distinction is that fact that autoimmunity as it is understood within immunology may be pathological, as in the case of autoimmune disease, whereby the immune system destroys integral parts of the organism, or, as is increasingly recognised, normal and even necessary, as in the case of autoimmune self-surveillance and cellular apoptosis (or "cellular suicide"),

whereby autoantibodies mediate, among other things, immune responses to damaged cells and malignancies (Tauber 2015, 53). These distinctions—between autoimmunity as a general term for all such phenomena, autoimmune disease, and "normal autoimmunity"—allow Eszter Timár to draw out the two interpretations of autoimmunity in Derrida's note, depending on whether "antibodies"—products of the immune system which neutralise pathogens—are understood as the object or agent of Derrida's autoimmune process. In one interpretation, the organism "itself," through a process that is unclear, destroys the immune system's antibodies; in the other, antibodies "refer to the agent of the destruction," thus "the body's immune system destroys its 'own' components" (E. Timár 2017, 67). The second case may be interpreted as referring to normal autoimmunity, that is, the immune system's self-regulation through self-destruction, a case that is largely agreed upon within immunology but little-understood outside of it—or at least not what is commonly thought when the word "autoimmunity" is used. This is not unlike Vitale's reading; he argues that Derrida "does not construct his general autoimmunitarian logic on the basis of autoimmune pathologies" (Vitale 2018, 169); rather, it is developed on the basis of "the ordinary organization and behavior of the living" (Vitale 2018, 175). Timár writes:

> If we want Derrida to be right, we may decide that he referred to this second case of normal autoimmunity. This however requires us to distinguish between incorrect or laic and scientifically appropriate or correct uses of the term "autoimmunity," and I would like to offer two reasons for resisting this temptation. One, in establishing "normal" autoimmunity as a subcategory of "autoimmunity," immunology in fact affirms the unqualified, unmarked term as the general meaning, so the separation between scientific and colloquial uses seems unjustified. Second, the first interpretation (which may seem wrong because of the inversion of the meaning of autoimmunity into its chiastic opposite) has an important significance in the history of immunology. (E. Timár 2017, 68)

Timár suggests that Derrida's explanation of autoimmunity bears a similarity to Paul Ehrlich's speculative notion of *horror autotoxicus*, often invoked as the theoretical predecessor to autoimmunity (E. Timár 2017, 68–69). Prior to immunology's turn toward the notion of immunological identity—i.e., that there is an "immunological self," and that the immune system could distinguish or recognise, with errors here and there, what was not-self and what

was self (Tauber 1997, 279; Silverstein and Rose 2000, 177)—immunology as a discourse had disavowed the possibility of autoimmune disease for decades. This was, in large part, due to a misinterpretation of Ehrlich's *horror autotoxicus*, which he wrote of in 1901, taken by many of Ehrlich's successors to refer to the impossibility of an organism producing autoantibodies, that is, antibodies that would target constituent parts of the organism (Silverstein 1989, 162–63). As Arthur Silverstein recounts, this was precipitated by the emerging field of bacteriology, which had led to a remarkably popular theory of autointoxication, advanced by Charles Jacques Bouchard in 1886 (and prefigured in Ancient Egyptian and Greek medical thinking), which proposed that "toxic products arising most usually in the intestinal tract from otherwise normal digestive processes… could produce a variety of different diseases" (Silverstein 1989, 161). Without rejecting outright the premises of theories of autointoxication, Ehrlich was nonetheless sceptical regarding the possibility of autointoxication by the immune system, writing that such a thing "would be dysteleologic in the highest degree" (Ehrlich in Silverstein 1989, 162; 2001, 279). However, elaborating on this point, he suggested:

> The organism possesses certain contrivances by means of which the immunity reaction, so easily produced by all kinds of cells, is prevented from acting against the organism's own elements and so giving rise to autotoxins… so that we might be justified in speaking of a "horror autotoxicus" of the organism. These contrivances are naturally of the highest importance for the individual. (Ehrlich in Silverstein 1989, 162)

What Ehrlich describes with the notion of *horror autotoxicus* is the apparent *inability* of autoantibodies, if produced, to actually *act* upon the organism's own cells; that is, the body's *aversion* to what might be described as "autointoxication." In contrast, many immunologists working after Ehrlich took this to mean that an organism was in fact incapable of *producing* autoantibodies, even to the point of discarding their own research that demonstrated evidence to the contrary (Silverstein 1989, 162–63). But, despite the mistaken conclusion drawn by many of Ehrlich's inheritors—i.e., that autoimmune disease could not occur—what is prefigured in Ehrlich's work and taken up much later in immunology is the idea that the immune system could self-regulate, ensuring that it did not, under normal circumstances, act against the organism of which it was a part. Moreover, as Timár points out, "we can

recognize Derrida's definition in Ehrlich's formulation: 'horror autotoxicus' is the regulation of an immune system posited as *quite capable* of inflicting harm on the organism" (Timár 2017, 69; emphasis mine). The potential for harm to the organism is, in Ehrlich's theory, neutralised by "certain contrivances"; while Ehrlich never elaborates fully on such mechanisms, later immunological theory would also argue that this is in fact the case (Silverstein 2005, 300), including in the work of Ameisen, as Vitale shows (Vitale 2018, 181). This should not, however, be taken to mean that autoimmunity—Derridean or otherwise—is harmless. Indeed, in Derrida's work as in the biomedical sciences, autoimmunity poses a risk to the self that it ostensibly functions to protect, though in Derrida's work it consists in "protecting itself against its own self-protection" (Derrida 2002a, 80n27).

One of the dangers of both autoimmunity and *horror autotoxicus* alike is that they complicate the matter of the "individual" that would be variously threatened or protected by such mechanisms. Autoimmune disease, understood as the aberrant misregulation of the immune system—that is, the failure or lack of *horror autotoxicus*—ostensibly leads the body to "attack itself" through the misrecognition of the self as other. Such a formulation hinges on the preestablished notion of an "immune self" protected by the immune system from what is foreign to it, and, moreover, *constituted* by the immune system's actions; it is conventionally understood—although contested by some figures, such as immunologist Polly Matzinger (1998, 2002) and philosophers of science Alfred Tauber (1997, 2015) and Thomas Pradeu (2012)—that the immune system's "silence" toward or tolerance of cells is what defines them as "self" and not "other." The immune system is not only the protector of but also what *defines* the proper "self" or identity of an organism. Hence the rejection of or attack on the "self" in pathological autoimmunity is figured as a paradoxical and suicidal aberration that not only endangers the life of the organism but which also undermines its fundamental "selfhood" or identity. But as Ed Cohen points out, *horror autotoxicus* too reveals a contradiction in identity as constituted through the immune system; following Ehrlich's formulation, he writes:

> The organismic "contrivances," which enjoin the organism's cells and molecules from "acting against the organism's own elements," "naturally" determine "the

> individual" as a non-contradictory or self identical formation. Yet, viewed the other way around, the "horror" of autotoxicity also reveals the existence of a fearful gap between the multiple cellular constituencies that comprise the organism and "the individual" as such. Hence, the "auto" of autotoxicus, which later becomes the "auto" of autoimmunity, reflexively obscures an important conceptual collapse: it identifies a confluence of diverse biological elements, here identified as the organism's "own," with and as "the individual" who is implicitly specified as their "owner." (Cohen 2004, 8)

That is to say, if *horror autotoxicus*—or, later, "normal autoimmunity" or cellular apoptosis—refers ostensibly to the mechanisms by which the immune system self-regulates precisely through neutralising its constituent parts lest they pose a risk to "the individual," what is obscured in the "auto" of both autotoxicus and autoimmunity is a splitting or self-difference *within* the "individual" ostensibly comprised by the immune system (its dangerous and protective elements alike) and the "remainder" of the organism. Cohen thus asks: if, for example, "autoimmune disorders represent the body's violent misrecognition of parts of itself as non-self, how stable can the received notions of 'self' be?" (Cohen 2004, 8). Indeed, we can further ask: if the immune system is what constitutes the "proper" of the self—the *autos* of autoimmunity and *autotoxicus* alike—how does Derrida's autoimmunity, insofar as it signals both the laic sense of self-destruction and the highly specific sense of "normal" autoimmunity's cellular suicide, defend "the proper" precisely through defending *against* it?

Derrida's reformulation of autoimmunity refigures it not merely as a malfunction or biological accident, but as simultaneously a threat to the proper self and its safeguard. In a seemingly illogical manner, it is precisely autoimmunity as a defence *against* the proper of the self that opens the possibility of the self's survival, through a seemingly destructive and "quasi-suicidal" process of destroying its own protective resources (Derrida 2003, 94). As Eszter Timár suggests (and as Vitale argues in reference to the work of Ameisen), in a certain sense we can find Derrida to have been "right" about autoimmunity, in that both older immunological thinking and recent developments in immunology are not so far from Derrida's "erroneous" conception of autoimmunity whereby the immune system is the object of self-protective destruction (E. Timár 2017). However, Timar cautions

> against an interpretation according to which Derrida "anticipates" immunology, or immunology "catches up" with deconstruction. Our finding Derrida to "have been right" may risk reading his work in a way that folds it into what he calls the discourse of organicist totalisation, a discourse he consistently tries to complicate in the way he discusses the matter of life. (E. Timár 2017, 66)

Indeed, in following through Derrida's thinking of autoimmunity, and its constitutive relationship to the life of the *autos*, we can find that despite the fact that autoimmunity occurs in the name of survival, the life that is promised is not so easily assimilable to organic life as it is determined by the biological sciences. Indeed, Derrida proposes, perhaps confusingly, to "extend to life *in general* the figure of an autoimmunity whose meaning or origin first seemed to be limited to so-called natural life or to life pure and simple, to what is believed to be the purely 'zoological,' 'biological,' or 'genetic' " (Derrida 2003, 187n7).

One example that Derrida cites as allowing him to speak of such a "general logic of auto-immunization" is what he calls "the positive virtues of immuno-depressants destined to limit the mechanisms of rejection and to facilitate the tolerance of certain organ transplants" (2002a, 80n27). Biomedical accounts establish that immunity is what makes it possible for us to live together with others; without immunity, it would ostensibly be impossible to survive any contact with anything other than oneself. Immunity is a necessary privation, an individuating mechanism that ensures the possibility of a shared life with others. But, as Derrida rightly points out, citing the use of immunosuppression in organ transplantation, certainly there are *some* instances in which it is necessary to be vulnerable to the intrusion of the other. The phenomenon of transplantation complicates the understanding of immunity as what protects life of the "self" from what is foreign to it by inverting the terms; in the case of organ transplantation, what is lifesaving is the intrusion of the foreign, and what is life-threatening is the immunological reaction in the form of rejection. But organ transplantation is largely a new phenomenon, made possible precisely because of the relatively new development of immunosuppressant treatment. As Elina Staikou points out, transplantation "would be a relatively straightforward and simple procedure and hardly a medical novelty if it did not carry the risk of immunological reaction. In the specific contingency that which makes the difference… is not the surgical procedure itself but the use of immunosuppressor drugs to protect from graft immunological reactivity and rejection" (Staikou 2014, 160).

This is to say, organ transplantation is only one, largely novel, and seemingly exceptional instance in which the suppression of the biological immune system is life-saving, rather than only and always life-threatening. And yet it is in such a phenomenon Derrida detects something to be generalised into a "logic of auto-immunization" (2002a, 187n7), although, in the context of this claim, the justification for the movement from the specific biomedical instance to the general logic is not explained. However, both Derrida's later work in which he refers to autoimmunity as a general logic, as well as his earlier work onto which the term autoimmunity can be reinscribed, give the grounds for the movement from the exceptional instance of immunosuppression to a general logic of autoimmunisation.

Immunosuppression in organ transplantation is one of the few instances in which Derrida discusses autoimmunity in relation to the living being, and to the human body. The phenomenon is exemplary of Derridean autoimmunity, but for reasons that go beyond its singular and exceptional status as an event in which it is necessary to do away with immunity. In the short text "L'Intrus" (2002), French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy—whose work frequently responded to Derrida's and about whose work Derrida wrote *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* (2005a)—produced an account of his own heart transplant and its ensuing effects over the following years, including the illnesses that emerge prompted by immunosuppression. Derrida suggests that Nancy's account is one of autoimmunity, writing that the "intrusion of *L'intrus*" is one name that Nancy gives to "what complicates an incarnation… the prosthesis, the metonymic substitute, the autoimmune process, and *technical* survival" (Derrida 2005a, 19). But autoimmunity—or the intrusion of *l'intrus*—troubles the very possibility of giving testimony. As Francine Wynn points out, Nancy's text is "not a narrative or autobiography in the conventional sense in which we speak of patient or medical narratives… in fact, Nancy problematizes the whole idea of a narrative as a means of gathering together the story of an individual subject as integrating and potentially healing or liberating" (Wynn 2009, 4). Indeed, at the very moment that his account begins—the first instance of an "I" in the text—the possibility of his own narration is brought into question: "I have—Who?—this 'I' is precisely the question, the old question: what is this enunciating subject?" (Nancy 2002, 2). If most narratives of illness function to recuperate or affirm a self and a future that is shattered or made strange by illness (Frank 1997, 56), "L'Intrus" appears to do the opposite. That is, it instead appears to reveal the ways in which transplantation,

immunosuppression, and illness stand as recuperative of the "self," despite all being forms of intrusion—and the "self" that would normally be made foreign by illness reveals its "own" prior estrangement.

Nancy's text recounts these multiple estrangements—although not necessarily in order—from his "own" body over a period of almost ten years. The most obvious of these is the intrusion into his body by someone else's heart, one whose origin is not known, that comes from "outside," and indeed could have come from anyone. He notes the emphasis placed on a notion of solidarity between the donor and recipient, one "without limit other than the incompatibility of blood type," and which crosses other categories that might be said to otherwise limit solidarity or community, such as sex and race; he notes that his heart "may be the heart of a black woman" (Nancy 2002, 8). But despite this emphasis on "solidarity, if not fraternity" (Nancy 2002, 8) the fundamental problem of transplantation reveals itself: the transplant inevitably proves itself unassimilable to his "own" body, by virtue of his immune system and the organ's immunological markers that inevitably determine the transplant as foreign. Nancy writes;

> Very soon, however, the other as foreign element [*étranger*] may manifest itself: not the woman or the black, not the young man or the Basque; rather, the immune system's other—the other that cannot be a substitute, but that has nonetheless become one. This is called "rejection"; my immune system rejects that of the other. (This means "I have" two immune system identities…) (Nancy 2002, 8)

Having had his heart substituted with that of another, his body ceases to be an organic unity; on the level of the immune system, his body has now two immunological "signatures" which recognise one another as foreign. The possibility of rejection, like autoimmune disease, is an instance in which the immune system's protection of the self from what it recognises as foreign endangers the self that it would otherwise protect. In order to properly protect the life of the body to which the immune system ostensibly belongs, the immune system itself must be suppressed. The act of transplantation therefore demands the institution of a technical or artificial "autoimmunity," in the sense of "normal" or beneficial autoimmunity—i.e. immunosuppression—to defend the self against the potential of harm from its "own" defensive mechanisms, which might too be construed as yet another kind of autoimmunity.

Nancy, who notes that "identity is equivalent to immunity, the one identifying itself with the other," writes of the immunosuppressant treatments that "medical practice thus renders the graftee a stranger to himself: stranger, that is, to his immune system's identity—which is something like his physiological signature" (Nancy 2002, 9). Such an exigency becomes more than simply a technical demand, given that the immune system is, at least within the context of transplantation, the arbiter of biomedical identity, for two reasons. Firstly, the immune system is estranged from the selfhood that now must be understood to reside *elsewhere* than within the immune system, which is to say that the immune system no longer "belongs" to the self as a constituent part. Secondly, immunosuppression is not merely the suppression of *defensive* mechanisms, but of the very arbiter of what is proper to the self; it thus institutes a more general estrangement or impropriety. Nancy thus writes, "in me there is the *intrus*, and I become foreign to myself" (Nancy 2002, 9); and this "foreignness" derives not simply from the sense that his heart is foreign, but also from the even more general estrangement instituted by the incapacitation of his immune system. The result of the transplant is, he writes, "the opening of an incision and an immune system that is at odds with itself, forever at cross purposes, irreconcilable," demanding the production of a further estrangement that is ongoing from the moment of the incision (Nancy 2002, 10).

Despite its seeming primacy, however, the foreignness that is instituted in the moment of transplantation—that of the foreign heart and the immunosuppression that prevents its rejection—is neither the first nor the last "*intrus*." For one thing, the immunosuppression that "renders the graftee a stranger to himself" (Nancy 2002, 9) has the effect of revealing other, prior, intruders—in Nancy's case, he writes that he "became familiar with shingles or the cytomegalovirus," (Nancy 2002, 9) both herpesviruses. As is well known, these viruses are frequently latent within the body, and occasionally reappear as infectious diseases, with or without symptoms (Stevens 1994, 191). Indeed, there are many other forms of life that take up residence in our bodies, and which are, for the most part, prevented from causing harm by the immune system or even by each other; as one popular university immunobiology textbook puts it, "we have adapted to live with our enemies, and they with us" (Murphy 2012, 42). But, as much conventional immunology would hold, these are precisely that; other forms of life—some of which are "enemies"—not constitutive of the self, but rather, cordoned off *inside* the body by the proper working of the immune system, which

is to say prevented from causing disease (Murphy 2012, 42). So it may simply be the case that the ongoing estrangement in which such forms of life make themselves known remains here a singular and exceptional case—nothing more than the result of a necessary intervention on the body by medical technology. This estrangement may be ongoing, after the fact of treatment, but might also be said to be only made manifest *by* the decisive moment of immunosuppressive treatment.

However, in another way, both the necessity and the singular event of transplantation reveal other estrangements, intrusions, and internal differences already at work in the biomedical body, as well as in the proper self that is understood to be grounded in it via the immune system. Perhaps surprisingly, the first "intruder" that Nancy draws attention to is in fact his own failing heart, not the heart which is transplanted into his body. Of this, he asks, "if my heart was giving up and going to drop me, to what degree was it already an organ of 'mine,' my 'own'?… It was becoming a stranger to me, intruding through its defection—almost through rejection" (Nancy 2002, 3). The first intruder appears as what should ostensibly be his "own," and its failure appears as a kind of betrayal. A similar observation is made by Francisco Varela, in his account of his own liver transplant, produced shortly after and highly influenced by Nancy's:

> We change all the cells and molecules of a liver every few weeks. It is new again, but not foreign. The foreignness is the unsettledness of the belonging with other organs in the ongoing definition that is an organism.
>
> In that sense my liver was already foreign; it was gradually becoming alien as it ceased to function… Years before the transplant, during a biopsy the surgeon came to see me: "I saw your liver, it looks very sick, you must do something about it." The statement made this silent organ suddenly un-me, threatening and already designated to be put at a distance in the economy of the body's self. Seeing from outside had penetrated me as a blade of alterity, altering my habitual body for ever. (Varela 2001, 262–63)

For Varela, his liver remains largely *unknown* until its failure; "seeing [it] from outside" refers not only to seeing the liver at the distance produced by imaging technology but even becoming aware of its presence—which makes it suddenly other, especially insofar as it is

destined to be removed. And yet, even while Nancy describes his heart's defection as it "becoming a stranger," he also writes that until he was informed of the necessity of a heart transplant, his heart "was foreign by virtue of its being insensible, not even present. But now it falters, and this very strangeness refers me back to myself: 'I' am, because I am ill" (Nancy 2002, 4). This would appear to be a complete inversion of both conventional narratives of illness and of his earlier claim, which would presumably imply a "habitual self" much like Varela's that is only interrupted by the alterity produced in the organ's failure. As Anne O'Byrne reflects on Nancy's text, "if my heart, the principle of my existence (and I can say this without its being an abstract statement) can fail and yet I continue to live, then I have become a stranger to myself" (O'Byrne 2002, 170). And yet there appears to be another kind of estrangement at work, that of the insensibility and intangibility of the heart as an organ, one that makes it foreign prior to its defection, then *again* foreign in its defection—which also, somehow, reifies or affirms selfhood in the same movement: " 'I' am, because I am ill."

What are we to make of this statement? What Nancy calls "this enunciating subject," the "I" that he questions throughout "L'Intrus," finding it always to be "foreign to the subject of its own utterance; necessarily intruding upon it, yet ineluctably its motor, shifter, or heart" (Nancy 2002, 2), Derrida names in the notion of *ipseity*. *Ipse* and *autos*, in their respective Latin and Greek, both refer to the self or the "one-self," which is to say the self with the ability to be self-referential, as in Nancy's " 'I' am, because I am ill" (Nancy 2002, 4). For Derrida, ipseity thus always denotes a "return to self, toward the self and upon the self" (Derrida 2005c, 10). Moreover, as is evident in so many words beginning with *auto-* (with the noted exception of autoimmunity), *ipseity* for Derrida is the name for the matrix of selfhood in the sense not just of individuation, but of sovereignty;

> By *ipseity* I thus wish to suggest some "I can," or at least the very power that *gives itself* its own law, its force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign and reappropriating gathering of self in the simultaneity of an assemblage or assembly…
>
> …Each time I say *ipse*, *metipse*, or *ipseity*, relying at once on their accepted meaning in Latin, their meaning within the philosophical code, and their etymology, I also wish to suggest the self, the one-self, being properly oneself, indeed being in person… I thus wish to suggest the oneself [*soi-même*], the "self-same [*même*]" of the "self [*soi*]" (that is, the same, *meisme*, which comes from *metipse*), as well as the

> power, potency, sovereignty, or possibility implied in every "I can," the *pse* of *ipse* (*ipsissimus*) referring always, through a complicated set of relations… to possession, property, and power. (Derrida 2005c, 11–12)

Ipseity is thus what Derrida identifies in the Western metaphysical tradition as what undergirds the very possibility of the sovereignty of, for example, the state, or the people within a democracy, since ipseity marks first of all the power of the self (*ipse* or *autos*), "before any sovereignty of the state" (Derrida 2005c, 12). *Ipseity* marks a kind of pre-stated, or pre-promised, "I can," that is, a self-authorisation of one's own power—one's autotely and autonomy, the very "power to give itself its own law." And this is what makes "autoimmunity" such an unusual word, in a sense; for, as Michael Naas remarks, unlike so many other words that begin with "auto-," of which *ipse* is a Latin translation, autoimmunity does not designate some power or authority of *ipseity*, but instead something that turns on the *autos* and threatens to compromise it; "while all the other *autos* words, without exception, express the power, independence, and stability of an enduring self, *autoimmunity* evokes the powerlessness, vulnerability, and instability of every self or *autos*" (Naas 2008, 125).

Derrida reads this thinking of ipseity through the figure of the wheel (*la roue*), as well as the turn or the tower (*le tour/la tour*);[2]

> But do we really need etymology when simple analysis would show the possibility of power and possession in the mere positioning of the self as *oneself* [*soi-même*], in the mere self-positioning of the self as properly oneself? The first turn or first go-round of circularity or sphericity comes back round or links back up, so to speak, with itself, with the same, the self, and with the proper of the oneself, with what is proper to the oneself proper. The first turn does it, the first turn is all there is to it [*le premier tour, c'est tout*]. The turn, the turn around the self—and the turn is always the possibility of turning round the self, of returning to the self or turning back on the self, the possibility of turning on oneself around oneself—the turn [*tour*] turns out to be it [*tout*]. The turn makes up the whole and makes a whole with itself; it consists in totalizing, in totalizing itself, and thus in gathering itself by tending

[2] It is a few sentences after this passage that he insists that "all turns [*tous les tours*], and all turrets, all towers [*toutes les tours*], including the turret of a chateau or the turning surface of a potter's wheel [*tour*]" are premised on the turn as a circular movement (Derrida 2005c, 12).

> toward simultaneity; and it is thus that the turn, as a whole, is one with itself, together with itself. (Derrida 2005c, 12).

This convoluted thinking of selfhood and sovereignty, Derrida argues, is central to the Western metaphysical and political traditions. Ipseity—as precisely sovereignty, autotely, autonomy—is the figuring of the proper self as constituted through the movement of speculation, of turning toward or recognising oneself as a subject, as is performed in saying or implying "oneself," or "I can." This is what Derrida calls "auto-affection," a certain kind of self-experience or self-relation, of which a unique example, he argues, is "*s'entendre parler,*" which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translates as "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak" in the English editions of *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1997b), and which is translated as simply "hearing oneself speak" in translations of *Speech and Phenomena* (Derrida 1973). The word *entendre* commonly means "hearing." However, it can also inflect its more archaic sense of "understanding"—for example, used reflexively, it can mean to get along well with another—to accord with or to understand the other. It can also mean, in a more formal sense, to "mean," a sense which is reflected—albeit perversely—in the English phrase *double entendre*, a corruption of the different but related French phrase *double entente*, which more explicitly and literally refers to a double meaning. Hence the seemingly clunky but altogether appropriate translation as "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak": one hears oneself speak, one is in agreement with oneself, one means what one says, one hears the *intended* meaning. "Hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak" appears to be a unique kind of auto-affection because, Derrida writes, it "is experienced as an absolutely pure auto-affection, occurring in a self-proximity that would in fact be the absolute reduction of space in general" (Derrida 1973, 79). Hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak seems to be absolutely autonomous; to speak to yourself in your own head does not call for any mediation—it does not require your voice to be heard by anyone else, to affect anything outside of you, or to pass through anything external in order to return and be heard; "the subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing through an external detour, the world, the sphere of what is not 'his own' " (Derrida 1973, 78). To this experience Derrida contrasts other kinds of auto-affection or self-reflection, such as looking at oneself in a mirror, which requires mediation through something not proper to the self; "what is outside the sphere of 'my own' has already entered the field of this auto-affection, with the result that

it is no longer pure… the surface of my body, as something external, must begin by being exposed in the world" (Derrida 1973, 78–79). Looking at oneself in the mirror requires, among other things, the mirror as the substance on which one's own image is reflected, but also the intervention of space, so that that image can be seen; and perhaps above all the image of oneself is not, after all, one's own, but something exterior, produced *outside* of the self (Cisney 2014, 151). Hence the uniqueness of hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak as a seemingly pure experience of auto-affection, in which there is no such apparent detour through the outside. But in Derrida's reading of this concept of auto-affection, he argues that its very principle in fact presupposes a "preexisting" or "more originary" difference in the very *autos* that would claim to be singular. If auto-affection is a relation of the self to the self, the *autos* of auto-affection must already be divided *in itself*, making of auto-affection a movement that "produces sameness as self-relation within self-difference" (Derrida 1979, 82). Thus every auto-affection, which is a matter of "immunising" the self, that is, producing a whole that is closed off from what is other to it, is also always a matter of auto-immunisation or auto-infection, producing this "whole" precisely *as* what differs from itself in its very ability to be auto-affective. Like in Cohen's reading of *horror autotoxicus*, what appears to determine the "individual" or *autos* as self-identical and present to itself, in the same motion reveals a seemingly originary self-difference—which is precisely what makes possible such a determination. Indeed, auto-affection or autoimmunity makes *ipseity* or the *autos* named in both terms "im/possible," a term John D. Caputo uses frequently to describe the functioning of such a logic throughout Derrida's work (Caputo 1993, 161; 1997, 24, 226; 2011, 43). Moreover, every attempt to shore up (or immunise) such self-presence by turning around oneself, closing the circle, always risks also turning *on* oneself and what would be "proper" to the self; "autoimmunity is always… cruelty itself, the autoinfection of all autoaffection" (Derrida 2005c, 109).

In *On Touching*, this movement of auto-affection is refigured in terms of touching—and "self-touching" in particular—rather than "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak." Derrida identifies what he calls a " 'tactilist' or 'haptocentric' tradition" that "extends at least until Husserl" (2005a, 41), and in which self-touching (*se toucher*) is privileged as a form of pure auto-affection that affirms self-presence and *ipseity*. Indeed "self-touching" is posited as *more* auto-affective than hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak, and even as what makes it

possible, as this pure auto-affection appears as "the condition of possibility of sensibility in general" (Derrida 2002a, 274). For this reason, Catherine Malabou suggests that Derrida, in his remarks on haptocentrism, has had something of a change of heart. She writes that in *On Touching*, "the sense of touch becomes… the most metaphysical of all senses, surpassing vision and hearing in its attachment to presence… following deconstruction's development and evolution, we have then moved from logocentrism to 'haptocentrism' " (Malabou and Johnston 2013, 21). To be sure, "haptocentrism" may be read as a later revision, or at least a supplement to Derrida's thinking of logocentrism and to "hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak" as the exemplar of auto-affection in *Speech and Phenomena*. But what is the "affection" of auto-affection if not (already) touching—and also being touched? As Claire Colebrook writes,

> For Derrida… touch, proximity, and affect have been mobilized as figures that enable a tradition of the metaphysics of presence. Indeed, the very reason or logocentrism that would supposedly be circumvented by embodiment and haptics, establishes itself *as a form of self-contact without distance or mediation*. (Colebrook 2013, 3; emphasis mine)

Put differently, hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak might be read (or re-read) as authoritative and affirmative of self-presence only insofar as, or precisely *because*, it presents itself as (already) a form of self-touching. Indeed this line of argument is already present in *Of Grammatology*, in which Derrida writes that "one must understand speech within this diagram," that is, one in which "the outside, the exposed surface of the body, signifies and marks forever the division that shapes auto-affection," which is the "operation of the touching-touched [*touchant-touché*]" (Derrida 1997b, 165). Indeed, the question of the "most pure" auto-affection—or, alternatively, the most authoritative *-centrism* to be deconstructed—is not itself the point, as Derrida clarifies:

> In acknowledging what its manual or digital example implies (as *best* and paradigmatic example, or "guiding thread" of the analysis), I ask whether there is any pure auto-affection of the touching or the touched, and therefore any pure, immediate experience of the purely proper body, the body proper that is living, purely living. Or if, on the contrary, this experience is at least not already *haunted*,

> but *constitutively* haunted, by some hetero-affection… where an intruder may come through, a guest [*l'hôte*], wished or unwished for, a spare and auxiliary other, or a parasite to be rejected, a *pharmakon* that already having at its disposal a dwelling in this place inhabits one's heart of hearts [*tout for intérieur*] as a ghost. (Derrida 2005a, 179–80; translation modified)

And, on the following page, Derrida asks: "shouldn't one rather distinguish between several types of auto-hetero-affection without any pure, properly pure, immediate, intuitive, living, and psychical auto-affection at all?" (Derrida 2005a, 180). Indeed, given that auto-affection, in Derrida's analysis, never coalesces into a "pure, immediate experience of the purely proper body," all such examples—self-touching, hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak, saying "my heart"—cease to be singular insofar as they are all conditioned by a "more originary" "exappropriation" or estrangement that institutes im/possibility of the proper body.

When Nancy states that " 'I' am, because I am ill," therefore, it is not so simple as a straightforward inversion of the terms of illness and selfhood: it is not the case that the "self" is fragmented or foreign to itself and then is made whole by illness. As Derrida points out in *On Touching*, the heart as an organ is, first of all, intangible, despite the fact that it might be said to reside at the very core of bodily integrity and indeed of life—as in O'Byrne's point that the heart is the "principle of my existence" (O'Byrne 2002, 170). Derrida writes:

> The heart is one of those interior surfaces of the body that, in principle (unless one performs the unimaginable, at least for now, operation of open-heart surgery on oneself), no "self-touching" [*se toucher*] can ever reach—what might be termed the heart's hide [*la peau du cœur*]. (Derrida 2005a, 267)

While on the one hand, the (healthy or "good") heart is marginally sensible, as "the rhythm, respiration, and beating of the blood" (Derrida 2005a, 267)—i.e., through its mediated effects—it is also and at the same time for Nancy "not an organ, not a deep red, muscular mass with pipes sticking out of it… not 'my heart' endlessly beating, as absent to me till now as the soles of my feet walking" (Nancy 2002, 3). One condition, then, by which the heart properly belongs to the self is precisely *in being foreign*: that it is not touched on, addressed or even recognised as such, as "my heart"; it is only in its defection or failure that it becomes

necessary to identify it as "one's own." Of this paradoxical relation in Nancy's account, Diane Perpich writes, "the self's *proper* immersion or submersion in itself—its mindless, easy relation to itself—is interrupted as it is forced to identify itself materially and thus in ways it never had before with this body and this organ" (Perpich 2005, 81–82). It is, then, the estrangement of the heart that institutes it *as* "one's own," through a double movement that both determines the heart *as* proper to the self at the same time as it reveals its seemingly *prior* impropriety. Moreover, in the case of organ failure as in Nancy and Varela's accounts, this forces the technical, biomedical interventions that would attempt to reinstate the "proper" of the self by way of further intrusions, and which produce multiplying estrangements or improprieties: the replacement of the organ with one belonging to someone else (which is always contingent on the participation and decisions of many people other than the patient), the clashing of immunological "identity" markers, the bodily estrangement produced by immunosuppressive treatments, the further intrusions of disease either made possible or revealed by immunosuppression, right up to, in Nancy's case, lymphoma, appearing "like the figure—worn, jagged, and ravaging—of the *intrus*" (Nancy 2002, 10). Nancy's statement, " 'I' am, because I am ill," does not refer to being made whole by disease; instead, organ failure, transplantation, and immunosuppressant treatments all attempt to gather together an "I" that is always-already multiple, improper, and estranged from itself.

Derrida, in his reading of Nancy, through the linked concepts of auto-affection and self-touching, suggests that *any* address to the "self" always addresses that which is "one's own" (whether the heart or anything else ostensibly "proper" to the self) *as* belonging to the other. He writes:

> Even *self*-touching touches upon the heart of the other. Hearts never belong, at least there where they can be touched. No one should ever be able to say "my heart," my own heart, except when he or she might say it to someone else and call him or her this way—and that is love. There would be nothing and there would no longer be any question without this originary exappropriation and without a certain "stolen heart." (Derrida 2005a, 273).

Moreover, he insists that this originary exappropriation or impropriety, and the attendant possibility for betrayal, is what makes it possible for the heart (and anything else proper to the self) to *be* proper in the first place. Of this betrayal, he writes:

> In order for there to be this heart, this good heart, the possibility of the bad heart must remain forever *open*—which is to say to itself as to any (wholly) other [*à lui-même comme tout autre*]. A heart would not be good unless it could be other, bad, radically, *unforgivably* bad, ready for any infidelity, any treachery and perjury… and therefore unless one could have a change of heart. (Derrida 2005a, 283; translation modified)

These two claims, taken together, articulate Derrida's logic of autoimmunity. Indeed, reading Derrida's remarks on auto-affection alongside his interpretation of "L'Intrus" provides a path along which to trace autoimmunity's movement from the specific and exemplary instance of organ transplantation to a general logic of life. Autoimmunity as a general logic consists in a double movement at the heart, so to speak, of any *autos*—any "self" or anything "proper" to itself—that makes the proper of the *autos* possible even while it interminably threatens to ruin it altogether. Hence Derrida's claim, early in *On Touching*, that "the intrusion of *L'intrus*" is one name among several others that Nancy bestows on "what complicates an *incarnation*": "the prosthesis, the metonymic substitute, the autoimmune process and *technical* survival," to use Derrida's own terms rather than Nancy's (Derrida 2005a, 19). Organ transplantation and its attendant interventions, as in "L'Intrus," turn out to be exemplary of the autoimmune process—but not (only) for the necessary suppression of the immune system therein. Rather, it is exemplary because such a process reveals and enacts a "more originary" autoimmunity, an internal estrangement and constitutive threat at work within the body generally otherwise understood to cohere into a determinate self.

The heart, like autoimmunity, is in Derrida's work reducible neither to its biomedical meaning as an organ—a mass of muscle or a spare part to be exchanged—nor to a symbolic object, standing in as "life" or else as the locus of affection, love, generosity, and so on. The two senses inevitably contaminate each other, not only in Derrida and Nancy's work but also in the sources that Derrida draws on to make such claims. Indeed, following Timár, we would be wise to avoid treating Derrida's numerous references to the biological sciences as,

on the one hand, an attempt to confirm, recite, or indeed perform biological science—risking folding Derrida's work into "the discourse of organicist totalisation" in which Derrida could be found to be empirically right (or wrong)—nor, on the other hand, to treat them as merely (mis)appropriations, whose meanings cannot and do not pertain to their biomedical usage—which would risk insisting that the biological sciences remain undeconstructible, and that they hold as *their* exclusive domain the study of the life of the living. In *Rogues*, Derrida comments on his appropriation of the lexicon of autoimmunity:

> Why speak in this way of autoimmunity? Why determine in such an ambiguous fashion the threat or the danger, the default or the failure, the running aground or the grounding, but also the salvation, the rescue, and the safeguard, health and security—so many diabolically *autoimmune* assurances, virtually capable not only of destroying themselves in suicidal fashion but of turning a certain death drive against the *autos* itself, against the ipseity that any suicide worthy of the name presupposes? In order to situate the question of life and of the living being, of life and death, of life-death, at the heart of my remarks. (Derrida 2005c, 123)

Indeed, if Derrida's use of autoimmunity is nothing but another "name or example of deconstruction" or a "nonsynonymous substitution" for *différance*, the *pharmakon*, or auto-affection and "self-touching" (Derrida 2002a, 364; 2003, 124; 1982, 12), its significance as a term appropriated (wrongly, even) from the biomedical sciences is twofold; firstly, as Michael Naas has argued, "whereas 'deconstruction' often lent itself to being (mis)understood as a 'method' or 'textual strategy' aimed at disrupting the self-identity of a text or concept… 'autoimmunity' appears to name a process that is inevitably and irreducibly at work more or less everywhere, at the heart of every sovereign identity" (Naas 2008, 124). Secondly, its appropriation from the biological sciences makes explicit the matter of survival as the complication or co-implication of life and death in Derrida's work, extended beyond the question of "biological life" to the survival of anything that could be said to have such a "sovereign identity," not least community and democracy. To borrow Dawne McCance's description of Derrida's *La Vie La Mort* seminar, autoimmunity explicitly puts life "back on the drawing board," performing a work of inheritance from both the philosophical and biological that may be transformative for both (McCance 2019, 4–5).

For Derrida, then, notwithstanding the apparent specificity and novelty of transplantation and immunosuppression, *l'intrus* is Nancy's name for what Derrida calls autoimmunity (among other things), and is what renders the life of any *autos* or *ipse* always-already open to alterity. This is not only because of the simple fact of immunosuppressant drugs, although these serve as one supplement among others, but rather because each attempt to immunise the living "body proper" attempts to gather together a "self" or body (or identity, or *autos*, *ipse*, enunciating subject, "I," transplant recipient, narrator, and so on) that can only be gathered together *as such* by virtue of being already estranged from itself. As Derrida insists in another text, the techno-scientific interventions of transplantation and immunosuppression, along with "so many prosthetic structures,"

> obligate us to reelaborate the very norms of our elementary perception as to what is an ensemble or an organic identity, the "living together" of a proper body. For a proper body is first of all a manner of being together, symbiotically, with oneself and in proximity—a symbiosis that, here too, we can *neither deny nor justify*. (Derrida 2013, 39)

That is to say that for Derrida, as well as for Nancy (at least in Derrida's reading), the "proper body" already consists in being "closed open," which is to say is proper *only* insofar as it is exposed to, or "living together" with what is foreign to "it." If the "positive virtues of immuno-depressants" authorise Derrida "to speak of a sort of general logic of auto-immunization," it is because such supplements serve as the artificial institution or reproduction of an autoimmune logic already at work in any proper body, an autoimmune logic that makes the "proper" possible, and at the same time institutes an infinite vulnerability to the other—which may be nothing other than one's own heart, as in Nancy's case. Indeed Nancy, in the final paragraph of "L'Intrus," asserts that "the *intrus* is no other than me, my self; none other than man himself. No other than the one, the same, always identical to itself and yet that is never done with altering itself" (Nancy 2002, 13). Thus Derrida's interpretation of Nancy's exemplary testimony, and of *l'intrus* as autoimmunity, places, as he suggests in *Rogues*, "the question of life and of the living being, of life and death, of life-death, at the heart of [his] remarks" (Derrida 2005c, 123). Moreover, it can be seen to situate autoimmunity at the heart of the "purely proper body, the body proper that is living, purely living" (Derrida 2005a, 179). Understood in this way, as not merely a negative chance

at the heart of immune self but the constitutive condition of the living being, in a certain sense, autoimmunity renders all life always-already collective. But the question of what it would mean, therefore, to "extend to life *in general*" this autoimmunity "whose meaning or origin first seemed to be limited to so-called natural life or to life pure and simple, to what is believed to be the purely 'zoological,' 'biological,' or genetic' " (Derrida 2003, 187n7), remains to be seen. That is, if autoimmunity situates life as being, in some sense, *in community*, its consequences *for* any community (say, religious or democratic) that it might be said to constitute, therefore, call for reassessment in the wake of the biodeconstructive claim that life is not merely an "issue" or theme of deconstruction but rather its "very matrix" (Vitale 2018, 1).

2 Surviving Autoimmunity

Given that autoimmunity appears to render life always-already collective, even at its most individual and apparently "biological" or "natural," we have cause to wonder what Derrida's reference to "life *in general*" *beyond* "life pure and simple" should be taken to mean: species-life? ecosystems, perhaps, or even more generally, environments? Or, alternatively, and more conventionally, something more like culture, religious community, or the body politic—all collectives that Vitale appears to understand as "products of the living" through which autoimmunity's effects are propagated (Vitale 2018, 172). Despite biodeconstruction's displacement of the centrality of these concepts to autoimmunity's meaning in favour of its biological roots, Derrida's most detailed elaborations of autoimmunity take place in reflections on the political, the nation-state, community, democracy, and religion—i.e., in those works that constitute the ostensible "political turn" in his oeuvre.

Derrida's use of autoimmunity in relation to these themes arguably lends itself to a pessimistic reading on the basis of its apparently suicidal or self-destructive character. Democracy, for example, "has always been suicidal" (Derrida 2005c, 33). For an "obvious and current example" of the logic of autoimmunisation, he suggests in *Rogues*—lectures delivered in 2002—one can look to the events of September 11 and their aftermath, particularly the still-evolving responses of the United States administration (Derrida 2005c, 39). Previously, in "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," an interview undertaken only weeks after September 11, he had described the attacks themselves as doubly suicidal;

> Immigrated, trained, prepared for their act in the United States by the United States, these *hijackers* incorporate, so to speak, two suicides in one: their own (and one will remain forever defenceless in the face of a suicidal, autoimmunitary aggression—that is what terrorizes most) but also the suicide of those who welcomed, armed, and trained them. For let us not forget that the United States had in effect paved the way for and consolidated the forces of the "adversary"… by first of all creating the politico-military circumstances that would favour their emergence and their shifts in allegiance. (Derrida 2003, 95)

At the time of *Rogues*, he directs us to the autoimmunitary character of the United States' *response* to the attacks as well; by waging war against what it called "the enemies of freedom and the assassins of democracy," the United States administration also waged its own war against "so-called democratic freedoms" inside its own borders, authorising, for example, the indefinite detention of immigrants and expanded surveillance and interrogation powers against its own people (Derrida 2005c, 39–40). Twenty years on from the invasion of Iraq, and all the events it precipitated—including the Iraqi civil war, the withdrawal of US troops (in 2011), the emergence of the Islamic State and the numerous attacks worldwide it has claimed to have instigated, and another "intervention" and withdrawal (in 2014 and 2021, respectively)—the notion that so many immunitary interventions ostensibly in the name of "freedom" and "security" have only increased risk and insecurity, not only for residents of the United States and Iraq, but the rest of the world as well, is hardly controversial. As J. Hillis Miller argues, the War on Terror served to *produce* and *multiply* the terror (2008, 209–210), in so many "suicidal autoimmunitary actions" that appear to confirm Derrida's diagnosis as, unfortunately for us, "prophetically right" (2008, 223). Despite the biodeconstructive view of autoimmunity as necessary to the life of the living being, an autoimmunity of, say, the national body, or of community more generally, appears at first wholly negative. Timothy Campbell, for example, claims that for Derrida autoimmunity is a "full-blown suicidal tendency at the heart of community" (2006, 8), one that leads any protective effort to degenerate into a self-destructive autoimmune crisis (2006, 9). Perhaps it is worse.

For if autoimmunity consists in being "closed open," this would appear to institute a kind of radical vulnerability to the other that no immunisation can ever protect against. Moreover, the potential for destruction of the "immune system"—as we have seen, the very

mechanism by which the division between "self" and "non-self" is *instituted* and maintained as such—bears the potential for something perhaps *worse* than suicide, as Derrida writes:

> For what I call the autoimmune consists not only in harming or ruining oneself, indeed in destroying one's own protections, and in doing so oneself, committing suicide or threatening to do so, but, more seriously still, and through this, in threatening the I [*moi*] or the self [*soi*], the *ego* or the *autos*, ipseity itself, compromising the immunity of the *autos* itself: it consists not only in compromising oneself [*s'auto-entamer*] but in compromising the self, the *autos*—and thus ipseity. It consists not only in committing suicide but in compromising *sui-* or *self-*referentiality, the *self* or *sui* of suicide itself. Autoimmunity is more or less suicidal, but, more seriously still, it threatens always to rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity. (Derrida 2005c, 45)

Autoimmunity threatens collective life not only with death, but also with the destruction of the identification that constitutes any collective as such. If autoimmunity, as we have seen, defends the proper by defending *against* it, this problematises the matter of its framing as "suicidal," and should lead us to question autoimmunity's consequences for life in general. For if autoimmunity compromises, as Derrida argues, "the *self* or *sui* of suicide itself," it can be thought as *ultra*suicidal, in that it bears so radical a threat as to "rob suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity" (Derrida 2005c, 45). At the same time, however, such a compromising of the "*self* or *sui*" would make such an act *less than* suicidal, indeed even rendering suicide impossible, insofar as suicide is contingent on a proper and sovereign self—an *ipse* with the authority or capacity to put itself to death. If autoimmunity compromises such *ipseity* in advance, autoimmunity can only be *quasi*-suicidal, that is, both more and less than suicidal, the *quasi-* signalling its "im/possible promise/threat" (Caputo 2011, 43). Of course, claiming this does not simply mitigate the risks: instead, it makes for a vulnerability that is, as Derrida writes, "by definition and by structure, by situation, without limit" (Derrida 2003, 188n7). How could such a vulnerability be anything but catastrophic? Even if, as Derrida argues, this vulnerability is a condition of possibility for all life, how is it the case that the living does not merely succumb to autoimmunity? What place is there in this condition for any possibility, let alone "promise," of survival?

In "Faith and Knowledge," Derrida explicitly posits autoimmunity as what keeps any given community alive. He writes:

> Community as *com-mon auto-immunity*: no community [is possible] that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity, a principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection (that of maintaining its self-integrity intact), and this in view of some sort of invisible and spectral sur-vival. This self-contesting attestation keeps the auto-immune community alive, which is to say, open to something other and more than itself: the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or the love of the other, the space and time of a spectralizing messianicity without messianism. (Derrida 2002a, 87)

This passage puts forward the central thrust of autoimmunity's promissory relation to life: it maintains life by keeping it "open to something other and more than itself"—including, paradoxically, death. *Is* that a promise? Is it just a threat in disguise, something like J. L. Austin's exemplary "misapplied" performative (1975, 35), "I promise I will bash your face in"? Derrida appears to confirm this in *Rogues*, writing of autoimmunity as "a *double bind* of threat and chance, not alternatively or by turns promise and/or threat but threat *in* the promise itself" (Derrida 2005c, 82). And yet, Derrida insists, without such a promise that "entails the greatest risk, even the menace of radical evil," there would be no future, nothing "to come" for community whatsoever (Derrida 2002a, 83). To understand this apparent paradox, we can turn to the worst of autoimmunity's possible consequences, that is, the possibility of remainderless self-destruction.

In 1984, Derrida presented a lecture at a colloquium convened on the premise of "nuclear criticism," titled "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)." This text precedes the appearance of autoimmunity in Derrida's work, and yet—perhaps unsurprisingly, given the subject matter—makes frequent reference to self-destruction. In this way, it can be seen to prefigure autoimmunity's appearance in later texts, and indeed Derrida regularly refers to the "total" threat of nuclear destruction in such later discussions of autoimmunity (e.g. Derrida 2003, 97–99). As he points out in his "first missive," "people find it easy to say that in nuclear war 'humanity' runs the risk of its self-destruction, with nothing left over, no remainder" (Derrida 1984, 20). Elina Staikou argues

that this remainderless self-destruction is the hypothesis of "autoimmunity in *extremis*," prefigured here but not named as such, and is crucial for understanding Derrida's autoimmunity (Staikou 2018, n.p.). As Derrida suggests, the notion of a discourse on "nuclear criticism"—on which the colloquium is premised—is made both impossible and necessary by the possibility of remainderless self-destruction that nuclear war always threatens. On the one hand, it is necessary because nuclear war "has no precedent," and therefore is "a phenomenon whose feature is that of being *fabulously textual*, through and through," and as such, "one can only talk and write about it" (Derrida 1984, 23). On the other, however, nuclear catastrophe is "unsymbolizable, even unsignifiable" (Derrida 1984, 28)—how could we "talk and write about it" at all? The possibility of remainderless self-destruction forces us up against the limits of critique, insofar the possibility that it presents is that of there being *nothing* to critique. And yet, as I suggested, this is what drives the necessity of something like "nuclear criticism." The "absolute inventiveness" of nuclear war as an event that "remains to be invented" (Derrida 1984, 24) is what makes it absolutely *necessary* to write, to critique, and so on—because, well, there's nothing else to do with it. But also, and perhaps more crucially, nuclear war is "linguistic" and "rhetorical," even *phantasmatic*, because despite the fact that it has never taken place (in the past), nuclear war haunts us from the *future*, its traumatising effects propagated according to the temporality of the future anterior (Derrida 1984, 23; 2003, 98). The "reality" of nuclear war, that is, lies in its (non)existence as a hypothesis or phantasm (1984, 23), one that *will have been* catastrophic. This possibility further engenders the proliferation of nuclear weapons around the globe, each existing to "persuade someone that something *must not* be done" (1984, 24) according to the logics of deterrence and mutually assured destruction. According to Caspar Weinberger—Secretary of Defense to the Reagan administration—whom Derrida cites, nuclear weapons exist only to *prevent* their use: "We see nuclear weapons only as a way of discouraging the Soviets from *thinking* they could ever resort to them" (in Derrida 1984, 25). As Liam Sprod suggests, while "the missiles may be real," their reality is furnished by "the fiction of a text" (2012, 21)—the utterly "unsymbolizable, even unsignifiable" phantasmatic subject of total annihilation, the "absolute effacement of any possible trace" (Derrida 1984, 28).

This is one form of what Derrida occasionally calls "the worst" (e.g. 2005c, 153), a term that appears in his texts just frequently enough to provoke debate among scholars of deconstruction. Samir Haddad, responding to previous accounts by Martin Hägglund (2008, 2009) and Leonard Lawlor (2007), suggests that "the worst" for Derrida is "the complete eradication of all difference, the absolute end to alterity" (Haddad 2013, 83). As we will see, this is not reducible to a straightforwardly ethical claim despite what the reference to alterity might suggest (and for more than one reason). Nonetheless, one would certainly assume that there is *something* normative at work here. If Derrida's use of "the worst" indicates a preference, it is for survival, one that he asserts plainly in his last interview (Derrida 2007a, 51–52). But "survival," as I have suggested already, is not reducible to what we at least *usually* mean when we say "life"; recall, for instance, Derrida's assertion in "Faith and Knowledge," that autoimmunity keeps community alive, "which is to say, open to something other and more than itself: the other, the future, death, freedom…" (2002a, 87). What the "worst" threatens, that is, is not (merely) "life," but *survival*, a term we can now recognise, not only in the context of the living being but in the context of community and collective life, as indicating something that takes place through the *exposure* to alterity.

What autoimmunity both promises and threatens, Derrida argues, is the possibility of "an event worthy of the name" (2005c, 152). He claims that "without autoimmunity, with absolute immunity, nothing would ever happen or arrive; we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event" (Derrida 2005c, 152). Such events may well be traumatising—September 11 is one of them (Derrida 2003, 99). But events also happen all the time:

> After all, every time something happens, even in the most banal, everyday experience, there is *something* of an event and of singular unforeseeability about it: each instant marks an event, everything that is "other" as well, and each birth, and each death, even the most gentle and the most "natural." (Derrida 2003, 91)

The most minimal definition of an event then may be simply that it happens—or, with a different kind of emphasis, that something *arrives* or *comes*. But even the smallest of events "worthy of the name" would, on Derrida's terms, arrive without having been foreseen or

calculated in advance and, as a result, would be something that we could not immediately comprehend:

> The event is what comes and, in coming, comes to surprise me, to surprise and to suspend comprehension: the event is first of all *that which* I do not first of all comprehend. Better, the event is first of all *that* I do not comprehend… That is the limit, at once internal and external, on which I would like to insist here: although the experience of an event, the mode according to which it affects us, calls for a movement of appropriation (comprehension, recognition, identification, description, determination, interpretation on the basis of a horizon of anticipation, knowledge, naming, and so on), although this movement of appropriation is irreducible and ineluctable, there is no event worthy of the name except insofar as this appropriation *falters* at some border or frontier. (Derrida 2003, 90)

Derrida insists on this failure of comprehension, he argues, because if an event was expected, anticipated, or calculated in advance, there would be no event at all, only a "predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow" (Derrida 1995b, 387)—there would be nothing *to* comprehend, since whatever happened would *already* be inscribed into our present systems of knowledge and identification. Instead, it is the absolute unforeseeability, and thus incomprehensibility, of an event, that calls for its comprehension—a comprehension that must necessarily falter. In this regard, an event in this strong sense is what we don't understand or recognise—even *as* an event. Instead of being comprehensible within existing systems of recognition, anticipation, and identification, an event *alters* these, even up to and including challenging the very concept of event itself:

> For could an event that still conforms to an essence, to a law or truth, indeed to a concept of the event, ever be a major event? A major event should be so unforeseeable and irruptive that it disturbs even the horizon of the concept or essence on the basis of which we believe we recognize an event *as such*. (Derrida 2003, 90)

An event "worthy of the name" is thus in a certain sense impossible—which is not to say that events never happen, or cannot happen, but rather that they cannot be thought within the

horizon of what is at the moment "possible." And this is why Derrida argues that "the experience of the other as the invention of the impossible" is "the only possible invention" (Derrida 2007b, 15): the event is the arrival of what is absolutely other (*tout autre*), which is ultimately not the possible, for if it were possible, it would already be assimilated and comprehended, neutralized in advance.

The interest or orientation of deconstruction, Derrida has argued, is toward this "experience of the impossible" (Derrida 2007b, 15). In a letter published as "Afterw.rds," Derrida even goes so far as to call this the "least bad definition of deconstruction" (Derrida 1992a, 200). This is to say that deconstruction is wholly oriented toward this future-to-come, toward any "event worthy of the name," no matter what or who comes. In an interview, Derrida insists:

> The openness of the future is worth more; that is the axiom of deconstruction, that on the basis of which it has always set itself in motion and which links it, as with the future itself, to otherness, to the priceless dignity of otherness, that is to say justice. (Derrida 2002b, 105)

But—given that an event worthy of the name is unforeseeable, incalculable, even impossible—what would it mean to be oriented toward such an event or experience? For, as John D. Caputo remarks, "the *tout autre* is not some sort of being-in-itself on the 'other side' of the horizon, the being-there (*être-là*) of some absolute outside, some absolute exteriority" (Caputo 1997, 24): the event worthy of its name—or the incoming of the *tout autre*—is not a matter of something waiting to arrive on cue, but is experienced in the failure or faltering of comprehension, as a "shock to the system in place" (Caputo 1997, 24). Indeed, even attempts at closure to the event appear to fail: in the same interview in which Derrida offers "the openness of the future is worth more" as the "axiom of deconstruction," he continues:

> One can imagine the objection. Someone might say to you: "sometimes it is better for this or that not to arrive. Justice demands that one prevent certain events (certain 'arrivants') from arriving. The event is not good in itself, and the future is not unconditionally preferable." Certainly, but one can always show that what one is opposing, when one conditionally prefers that this or that not happen, is something

> one takes, rightly or wrongly, as blocking the horizon or simply forming the *horizon* (the word that means *limit*) for the absolute coming of the altogether other, for the future itself. (Derrida 2002b, 105)

That is to say that opposing or preventing an undesirable event, for Derrida, would be premised on the perception that the event being opposed itself closes off the future. Thus, as Caputo writes, an openness to the future does not mean "that one should give up trying to prevent certain things from coming to pass (without which there would be no decision, no responsibility, ethics or politics)" (Caputo 2011, 83). Rather, Caputo suggests that responsibility might consist in opposing "events that one thinks will block the future or that bring death with them: events that would put an end to the possibility of the event, to the affirmative opening to the coming of the other" (Caputo 2011, 83).

It is this conception of the event that forms the basis of both survival and the future to come. What autoimmunity makes possible is the opening of the future itself to the unforeseeable, which cannot be predicted or calculated in advance, and without which there would be no future at all (Derrida 2005c, 148–49). As he writes in *Rogues*:

> If an event worthy of this name is to arrive or happen, it must, beyond all mastery, affect a passivity. It must touch an exposed vulnerability, one without absolute immunity, without indemnity; it must touch this vulnerability in its finitude and in a nonhorizontal fashion, there where it is not yet or is already no longer possible to face or face up to the unforeseeability of the other. In this regard, autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes—which means that it must remain incalculable.

The "exposure to alterity" that is made possible with or through autoimmunity, then, is more than merely exposure to the other as another living being: instead, it is exposure "to what or who comes," no matter what or who, no matter if the event that arrives or happens is good or bad. The vulnerability "without limit" produced by a general logic of autoimmunity is thus what constitutes its promise of survival, in that it makes possible the incoming of the other, which is, for Derrida, "the only future" (Derrida 2007b, 46). Absolute immunity, in contrast, would consist in an absolute foreclosure to anything other, and hence to any future

to come—it would amount, in other words, to *the worst*. Total immunity, it turns out, threatens to bring about the same situation as the threat that haunts autoimmunity as a necessary possibility—that is, *no remainder*, which should be taken to mean both residue—what remains left over after the fact of an event—as well as what remains to come.

What this conception of autoimmunity and the future makes of "survival" for collective life can be clarified by reading another instance of "the worst." In "Force of Law," Derrida associates the worst with the final solution (Derrida 2002a, 298), which must be thought, he argues,

> Beginning with its other, that is to say, starting from what it tried to exclude and destroy, to exterminate radically, from that which haunted it from without and within. One must try to think it starting from the possibility of singularity, the singularity of the signature and of the name, because what the order of representation tried to exterminate was not only human lives by the millions—natural lives—but also a demand for justice, and also names: and first of all the possibility of giving, inscribing, calling, and recalling the name. (Derrida 2002a, 296)

Perhaps, had it "succeeded" on its own terms, the final solution, in exterminating all those who could bear a memory of a people, culture, literature, faith, and history, would have exterminated "the possibility of giving, inscribing, calling, and recalling the name." But it too looked to function rhetorically as well as corporeally: the project of the final solution not only attempted to exterminate human lives, but, as Derrida writes, "the name as memory," by replacing that memory, and its material incarnations—synagogues, libraries, schools, sacred objects—with its own manufactured archive. As Robert Bevan argues in *The Destruction of Memory*, in contrast to many other genocidal projects entailing the destruction of material culture,

> the reality of [German Jews'] existence, their presence in the community and the nation was never denied. The purpose of the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Question," as formalized at the Wannsee conference on 20 January 1942, was the intention to eradicate a race and all evidence of its culture, apart from representative

> examples of Judaica that would be housed in a museum in Prague—victory represented as archaeology. (Bevan 2016, 43)

Bevan concludes this passage by citing historian Elizabeth Domansky, who writes that "the Jews were not to be annihilated and then forgotten, but annihilated and then remembered forever… Eternal death was not to be oblivion, but the torture of being eternally remembered by the persecutors" (Domansky in Bevan 2016, 43).

The Nazi project sought not the total *erasure* of the Jewish archive but, rather, its destruction and *reproduction*. Derrida argues in "Force of Law" that the final solution must therefore be thought *beginning* with the archive and the name as memory, for several reasons:

> Not only because there was a destruction or project of destruction of the name… [but also because] at the same time, it kept the archive of its destruction, produced simulacra of justificatory arguments, with a terrifying legal, bureaucratic, statist objectivity and (at the same time, therefore) it produced a system in which its logic, the logic of objectivity, made possible the invalidation and therefore the effacement of testimony and of responsibilities, the neutralization of the singularity of the final solution; in short, it produces the possibility of the historiographic perversion that has been able to give rise to both the logic of revisionism (to be brief, let us say of the Faurisson type) as well as a positivist, comparatist, or relativist objectivism (like the one now linked to the *Historikerstreit*). (Derrida 2002a, 296)

That is to say, first of all, that the attempt at "eternal remembrance" both in the form of the memorialisation of the Jewish people and history as imagined and rewritten by the Nazis, and the meticulous documentation of that process, produced an archive that looked to function, conversely, as erasure. As Samir Haddad writes, "the meticulous documenting of the process of erasure perversely serves to realize this process itself, for it replaces the traces left by those murdered with an alternative account. It is the erection of a memory that serves to *radically forget*, and in this way puts an end to all inheriting" (Haddad 2013, 85–86; emphasis mine). Indeed this is the point: to eliminate altogether any possibility of living on, in any residue of material support, living or otherwise, replaced by something altogether other, in a static, authoritative and singular history of the Jewish people. This project is

betrayed, however, by multiple factors: first of all, that despite its supreme cruelty and the millions of deaths it produced, it did not, once and for all, eradicate the Jewish people. But, in addition, in keeping "the archive of its destruction, [producing] simulacra of justificatory arguments, with a terrifying legal, bureaucratic and statist objectivity" (2002a, 296), the final solution reproduced, albeit perversely—that is, in an autoimmune fashion—the very archive that it attempted to erase. Such an archive, even ostensibly controlled and produced by the perpetrators, comes to be able to be taken up and inherited by those survivors, in a manner contrary to its intentions; as Haddad puts it, "the complete replacement of the archive failed to take hold, and traces of those millions murdered continue to survive" (Haddad 2013, 87). Thus it could, as Derrida writes in "No Apocalypse," "give rise to a symbolic work of mourning, with memory, compensation, internalization, idealization, displacement, and so on. In that case there is monumentalization, archivization and *work on the remainder, work of the remainder*" (Derrida 1984, 28).

This helps us to clarify what, for Derrida, is "the worst": not only the "extermination of human lives by the millions," but the destruction of another kind of survival that persists in archivisation, in "the possibility of giving, inscribing, calling, and recalling the name" (Derrida 1984, 28). It also helps to clarify that while the final solution is a project of the worst, it is one that, in the pursuit of the eradication of any trace of the Jewish people, produced its own traces and, in an autoimmune fashion, *neutralised* its own status as "the worst," insofar as it made possible the "work on the remainder," which is to say a kind of living on in the movement of inheritance. This claim is not to reduce the horror of the final solution—rather, it should lead us to question the comparative status of "the worst." As Haddad argues in his reading of "Force of Law," "*there are worse things than the worst*" (Haddad 2013, 87); the final solution may be one of them. Indeed Haddad's argument is twofold; firstly, "the worst" did not really happen in the case of the final solution, insofar as there remains an archive to be inherited and taken up otherwise, and the traces of those murdered "continue to survive"; and, secondly, " 'the worst' fails to function as a comparative term at all," insofar as it names "the total eradication of the future through the complete destruction of the archive that would produce a trace," and thus constitutes "an event altogether different from all others, from finite events that leave a trace" (Haddad 2013, 87). In Haddad's view, the worst remains to be invented, and moreover resists any

kind of calculation that could measure it up against the worst *finite* events in history. At the same time, however, what makes it distinct is not only that it has never occurred in the past, but that, in the "effacement of any possible trace," it could not simply *be* an event in the past like any other, but forecloses the future altogether—at once the future as the coming of another event, and as the inheritance of the archive. The invention of the worst—in nuclear catastrophe or the destruction of memory in a final solution unlike any other—would be without remainder, leaving nothing to be inherited, and no work of mourning would be possible.

"Work on the remainder," however, is certainly not *limited* to the work of mourning: in the same way that the final solution's archive was available to be taken up by the very survivors that it intended to eradicate, thus making possible the work of mourning, monumentalisation, and memory, that archive also produced the possibility of "historiographic perversion," as Derrida writes, that enables *other* kinds of work on the remainder, including the denial of such events as well as the revisionist reframing that would attempt to justify and normalise them as acts of war, as in the *Historikerstreit* (Derrida 2002a, 296). Moreover, such a threat of perverse inheritance pervades the very work of mourning *itself*, and the archive(s) produced in the name of those murdered in the course of the final solution, just as it haunted the projects that would try to prevent such mourning. Even ostensibly well-meaning works of mourning and monumentalisation risk becoming or appearing as something other than they intend: producing or making possible revisionism, historiography, or forgetting. Critiques such as Sam Holleran's of the aesthetic sensibilities of Holocaust memorialisation in *Jewish Currents* (2018) bear this out. Holleran notes the spike in museum construction beginning in the 1990s, and its "parallel spike in architectural projects that memorialise the Holocaust," "grand gestures of public memory" most closely associated with the work of architects Daniel Libeskind and Peter Eisenman. Libeskind's and Eisenman's works are emblematic of what has been described—including by the architects themselves, although others have attempted to distance themselves from the term—as "deconstructivist architecture," and Libeskind and Eisenman themselves were Derrida's collaborators, inheritors, and interlocutors.[3] Holleran insists, "as these projects become more

[3] Both Eisenman and Libeskind consider deconstruction to be a powerful influence on their approach to architecture, although several other (so-called) "deconstructivist" architects do not. Derrida and Eisenman

ubiquitous, we have to ask ourselves: what are these architectural behemoths really for?" (2018, n.p.). Such a question is urgent, he argues, "as Nazis march again in the streets of the US and Europe": what is at stake "is how we mediate the past in the built environment, and the aesthetic vision we attach to memories of suffering" (2018, n.p.). The problem, for Holleran, is not the production of memorials in general—he discusses at length, and admiringly, a number of memorials that present different modes of storytelling. Rather, his critique centres on the apparent establishment of a ubiquitous architectural sensibility, in the wake of the success of Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, "for all things Shoah-related" that he dubs "Shoahtecture," the hallmarks of which are "deconstructivist elements and an ostentatiousness of style, combined with government-funded, big-budget drives 'to remember' " (2018, n.p.). For Holleran, while there are certainly criticisms to be made of individual monuments and museums, what is of greater concern is the "out-of-the-box" architectural style and the drive to reproduce it, again and again—Libeskind's list of Holocaust museums and monuments continues to grow—in the service of "intense publicity pushes," "having the next 'it' building for *Architectural Digest*," and the demand to become " 'destinations' in a fiercely competitive cultural sphere" (2018, n.p.). Perhaps most exemplary of this impulse is the repetition of immense motifs created by the structures of several such museums, and which intentionally cannot be seen or accessed from the ground, but only from a "God's-eye view." Such features remain, however, only invisible from the perspective of a visitor—when photographed from the sky, they make perfect fodder for press releases, tourist brochures and *Architectural Digest*.

But what is at stake for Holleran is the possibility that such memorials conversely ease the collective conscience, and, in doing so, make possible a certain kind of *forgetting*. Jewish critic Henryk Broder, discussing Libeskind's Berlin Jewish Museum, does not pause to speculate on this possibility, asserting that "the Jews know that the museum is a crazy piece of junk [*megalomanischer Schrott*] meant to lighten the wounded souls of non-Jews, but they don't want to spoil the fun for the Germans who financed the whole thing" (in Isenberg 2002, 172). Holleran is more reserved, but the consequences are the same: he writes that

collaborated on the text *Chora L Works* (Derrida and Eisenman 1997), and correspondences between Derrida and each of the two architects have been published, including "Letter to Peter Eisenman" (Derrida 1990) and "Response to Daniel Libeskind" (Derrida 1997c).

Shoahtecture's exemplary museums, in their scale and grandeur, "demonstrate that societies have dutifully acknowledged the Holocaust, and, in doing so, can move on" (2018, n.p.)—which is to say, paradoxically, *forget*. This is perhaps especially the case for museums more than other forms of memorialisation, since such large-scale works "do not become part of our daily lived experience," but are intended to function as "sacred repositories" for the processing of trauma—which is to say, a closed-off space where such trauma can be separated from the rest of the city (Holleran 2018, n.p.). Indeed, as Thomas Houlton suggests regarding Rachel Whiteread's *Nameless Library*, Austria's first memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, such projects may function in a way more akin to encryption, in the sense that Derrida proposes in "*Fors*": "what the crypt commemorates, as the incorporated object's 'monument' or 'tomb,' is not the object itself, but its exclusion" (Derrida 1986, xvii). Houlton develops this further, however, arguing that what Whiteread's work confronts us with is "how the belated act of incorporating Holocaust victims back into a structural state narrative paradoxically does not mark this re-inclusion into national consciousness, it in fact encrypts and enforces that exclusion whilst perpetuating the encrypted violence and desires expressed within the structure of the Holocaust" (Houlton 2019, 90). Such state-driven projects, in both critiques, risk perpetuating—perhaps in a different form or disguise—the very traumas they are intended to commemorate: firstly, by enacting the spatial exclusion that they appear to commemorate, and secondly by condemning memory to rote, static, and state-authorised repetition, which is to say, to memory in the same structure (even if not the same intent) as the proposed museum of Judaica in Prague.

Perhaps surprisingly, similar anxieties plague Libeskind himself. In his conversation with Derrida regarding Derrida's response to the Berlin Jewish Museum, at which time the museum was not yet completed, Libeskind discusses his fear that the museum—and in particular, the void at its centre—could be transformed, filled, by the state. Libeskind writes, "one of the particular characteristics of this void is that it is very easy to bridge it in order to complete the building. And of course the pressure from the Senate and the public money reminds us that if one is already building such a space, why not fill it?" (Libeskind in Derrida 1997c, 115). Indeed, why not *more* memorialisation, first of all making the void visible, then filling it with archival documents, objects, and so on? For Libeskind, the building is intended to be "organized around a center which is not, around what is not visible. And what is not

visible is the richness of the Jewish heritage in Berlin, which is today reduced to archival and archaeological material, since physically it has disappeared" (Libeskind 1997, 34). Thus for Libeskind the void should neither be bridged nor filled, and should retain its cryptological function; to mark or commemorate an exclusion that *cannot* be reincorporated into the city of Berlin—which is not to say enforce or perpetuate such a desire for exclusion, although the possibility of such an interpretation remains possible. "The project," he writes, "is to make it inaccessible": "what one has to do as an architect in this case is to prevent the void from filling up" (in Derrida 1997c, 115). To do so would be, in his view, a kind of revisionism, in the name of memory but one that would constitute a misinterpretation or betrayal of the work's attempt at memorialisation, given that for Libeskind the archival material cannot be a substitute for the disappeared material culture and heritage. And yet Derrida responds:

> This exposure of your work to an always possible deterioration or misinterpretation is a chance, it is not a negative risk. If you were sure that your work would never be altered then it would not be a work. A work has to be left beyond your life, left exposed to manipulation or reinterpretation. That is why you build. The fragility itself is part of the possibility of the work. (Derrida 1997c, 115)

For Derrida, not only is the possibility of perversion or misinterpretation unavoidable, it is the work's condition as well as its *opportunity*. This is not, of course, to posit revisionism as a "good" outcome. Rather, it is to point out that even the most intently static memorialisations always risk being taken up otherwise; just as the Nazi archive left itself open to inheritance by those it intended to erase, and to rebuilding and relaunching otherwise rather than stasis, the inheritance of Libeskind's work cannot be closed off fully from manipulation or misinterpretation. Derrida's point, in the end, is that the possibility that a work left to the future may be taken up otherwise than intended is, in fact, a *constitutive* possibility, one without which there would be no work whatsoever, and no work on the remainder to come. But there are no reassurances here against that risk—only that the possibility of leaving something behind persists as a threat *and* chance.

What Libeskind's worries about his museum indicate is the autoimmune movement of survival not only in "living on"—as in, *after* life—but *in* life properly speaking as well, that can, perhaps, finally orient our interpretation of the claim that life is structured through its

exposure to not just any other, but to death as well. In Derrida's discussion of Robinson Crusoe in the second volume of the *Beast and the Sovereign*, he makes a remarkable claim, albeit one presented in the form of a supposition: that Robinson Crusoe really *was* "swallowed up alive," that he really did "die a living death," and this despite all the evidence that one could cite from the book to show that this remains a fantasy, the character Crusoe only imagining himself, in advance, swallowed up by the earth in an earthquake (Derrida 2011, 128). This fate is, Derrida argues, Crusoe's greatest fear:

> Robinson Crusoe's fundamental fear, *the* fundamental, foundational fear [*peur de fond*] from which all other fears are derived and around which everything is organized, is the fear of going to the bottom [*au fond*], precisely, of being "swallow'd up alive"… thus of sinking alive to the bottom, of sinking and being dragged down to the depths, as much because of an earthquake as because of wild or savage beasts, or even because of human cannibals. He is afraid of dying a living death [*mourir vivant*] by being swallowed or devoured into the deep belly of the earth or the sea or some living creature, some living animal. That is the great phantasm, the fundamental phantasm or the phantasm of the fundamental: he can think only of being eaten and drunk by the other, he thinks of it as a threat but with such compulsion that one wonders if the threat is not also nurtured by a promise, and therefore a desire. (Derrida 2011, 77)

The prospect of being eaten by the other—whether that other is the earth or the sea, or a living animal, or, for Crusoe, perhaps the worst and *most* other, a cannibal—captivates Crusoe and is his greatest fear, Derrida says. This fear is at once that of "dying alive," that is, being present for one's own death, as well as that of being entirely vulnerable to—consumed by—the other. Derrida notes, of course, that dying alive cannot really happen; "dying a living death, in the present, can never really present itself, as one cannot presently be dead, die, and see oneself die, die alive, as one cannot be both dead and alive, dying a living death can only be a fantasmatic virtuality, a fiction, if you like" (Derrida 2011, 130). And yet, he claims, *it really did happen to Robinson Crusoe*, and even, in fact, "it's what he wanted" (Derrida 2011, 129). He explains that in referring to "Robinson Crusoe"—aloud, in this seminar—he is "naming the narrative," but also all the other "Robinson Crusoes," of which there turn out to be several:

> I am claiming that dying a living death did happen to "Robinson Crusoe," the narrative itself, because when I say, when I pronounce "Robinson Crusoe," where you do not see the quotation marks between which I am suspending the proper name or the italics in which I am inclining it, when I say "*Robinson Crusoe*," I am naming the narrative… The narrative entitled *Robinson Crusoe* and, within it, the character and the narrator, the author of the journal and the character that the author of the autobiographical journal puts on stage are all different, other among themselves, but all are named by the same name "Robinson Crusoe," and as such they are all living dead, regularly buried, and swallowed up alive. (Derrida 2011, 129–30)

Each of these ones named by "Robinson Crusoe" survive as the living dead, that is, in the traces left by a fictional character in a fictional narrative written in the first person; "Robinson Crusoe," the person or his journal or the book, is both alive and dead, "kept alive by millions of inheritors" (Derrida 2011, 130).

As Derrida also insists in his last interview, this is the fact for *every* trace that one leaves; in writing, one lives one's own death:

> The trace I leave signifies to me at once my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the hope that this trace survives me. This is not a striving for immortality; it's something structural. I leave a piece of paper behind, I go away, I die: it is impossible to escape this structure, it is the unchanging form of my life. Each time I let something go, each time some trace leaves me, "proceeds" from me, unable to be reappropriated, I live my death in writing. (Derrida 2007a, 32–33)

This is not limited to writing, but to any trace, "however singular," "a gestural, verbal, written, or other trace" (Derrida 2011, 130)—in short, to anything that is left to be inherited, taken up by another. This movement by which the trace is taken up by the other *is* surviving (*survivance*), "*survivance* in the sense of survival that is neither life nor death pure and simple, a sense that is not thinkable on the basis of the opposition of life and death" (Derrida 2011, 130–31). This *survivance* is at work not only in the writing of a book, but in

"everything from which the tissue of living experience is woven, through and through" (Derrida 2011, 132); life as *survivance* is structured by the necessary possibility of dying alive, that is, of being taken up or inherited—eaten alive—by the other. Hence Derrida's insistence on a surviving "whose 'sur-' is without sovereignty"—a surviving "where some other has me at its disposal… where any self is defenceless" (Derrida 2011, 131). The possibility of *living on* is structured in advance by the vulnerability to the other that is both the promise and the threat of autoimmunity, which breaches the phantasm or fantasy of *ipseity* so exemplified by Robinson Crusoe. This deconstruction of life—"everything I say about survival"—as a complication or coimplication of life and death occurs, as Derrida insists, "on the side of the *yes*, on the side of the affirmation of life" (Derrida 2007a, 51). The double movement of autoimmunity, while it always threatens catastrophe for the *autos*, is always-already what makes it possible to be inherited by another, to be open to the event, and to the future—all of which is to say *alive* to the event of the other.

There is, then, for Derrida, no survival without vulnerability to the other, without a vulnerability instituted by an autoimmunity that also poses the threat of radical self-destruction, on the one hand, and misinterpretation or appropriation on the other. Moreover, the structure of inheritance cuts both ways: just as all finite events leave a trace, Derrida argues, we are subject to an inheritance that cannot be identical to itself and cannot be taken up intact, but instead must be "reaffirmed by transforming it as radically as will be necessary" (Derrida 2006, 67). Derrida writes, in *Specters of Marx*:

> Let us consider first of all, the radical and necessary *heterogeneity* of an inheritance… An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if it is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*. "One must" [*il faut*] means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. (Derrida 2006, 18)

That there is an injunction to reaffirm by choosing does not mean that we have a choice to inherit or not. Rather, there are two senses of "one must" (*il faut*) that should be distinguished, if only to confirm that they cannot be fully disentangled. *Il faut*, like "one must," carries the sense of both an injunction or instruction, but also of "it is necessary" or "it is inevitable." To say that *one must* inherit both means that we have no choice in the

matter and, at the same time, that it is incumbent upon us reaffirm such an inheritance by choosing. Derrida clarifies this in "For What Tomorrow":

> What does it mean to reaffirm? It means not simply accepting this heritage but relaunching it otherwise and keeping it alive. Not choosing it (since what characterizes inheritance is first of all that one does not choose it; it is what violently elects us), but choosing to keep it alive. (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004, 3)

Just as being inherited carries the terror and violence of being eaten alive by the other, when we inherit, the other "violently elects us," happens to or arrives upon us. Any inheriting, as we have seen, must be partial, incomplete, and unfaithful, and thus "one must filter, select, differentiate, restructure the questions": reaffirming an inheritance, for Derrida, means to "transform it as radically as will be necessary" (Derrida 2006, 67); indeed, this is the most faithful inheritance possible. So while, on the one hand, there is indeed a lack of choice in the fact that "the *being* of what we are is first of all inheritance, whether we know it or like it or not" (Derrida 2006, 68), such an inheritance comes with the injunction to "relaunch it otherwise," which is to say that the insistence on the affirmation of inheritance carries "no backward-looking fervor… no traditionalist flavor" (Derrida 2006, 67–68). The autoimmune structure of survival in and as the movement of inheritance, in making us vulnerable to the other, opens onto the future, the event, or anything to come.

At this point, we can turn back to Derrida's claim in "Faith and Knowledge," that

> no community [is possible] that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity… and this in view of some sort of invisible and spectral sur-vival. This self-contesting attestation keeps the auto-immune community alive, which is to say, open to something other and more than itself: the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or the love of the other, the space and time of a spectralizing messianicity without messianism. (Derrida 2002a, 87)

From this perspective, and with the understanding that survival as living on is distinct from "life properly so-called," we can come to make sense of the claim that community is kept alive by autoimmunity, in opening it to the other and indeed its own death. Indeed, we can

make the claim that "life properly so-called," as Derrida writes, "begins with survival" (Derrida 2011, 131), in being structured in advance by the autoimmune movement of inheritance, which consists in being defenceless before the other. In pursuing the question of autoimmunity's consequences for life, survival, as Kas Saghafi writes, "has become what happens when I am turned over to the other" (Saghafi 2015, 23). As Michael Naas argues, any consolation found in this survival must necessarily be tempered by the fact that

> The survival or living on whose logic Derrida has developed is anything but a "personal" survival, for the trace I leave behind is precisely not "my own," and the desperate attempt to multiply traces in order to leave more of myself behind does little more than distance me even more from "myself." (Naas 2012, 272)

That is, the promise that autoimmunity keeps alive is not that of a self-identical and sovereign identity, and the survival that it enables is one without salvation or redemption. And, it would seem, there is little we can do about it. This chapter began with an elaboration of some of the more catastrophic consequences of autoimmunity in a political frame. But if, at this point, we seem to have come to an inevitable affirmation of autoimmunity's promise, we also seem to have affirmed the logic that enables, among other things, the possibility of nuclear annihilation—and sacrificed our sovereignty along the way. In this light, perhaps it is no surprise that questions such as Nancy Fraser's (1984, 127)—"Is it possible—even desirable—to articulate a deconstructive politics?"—seem further complicated, rather than resolved, by the explicitly political content of Derrida's later works. Accordingly, the next chapter turns to the question of autoimmunity's normative force.

3 Between One Affirmation and Another: Autoimmunity's Normative Force

The analysis of autoimmunity through the previous chapters has shown that for Derrida, autoimmunity constitutes both the threat and chance of life, whether of the individual living being, or intergenerationally, as in a culture or community. Life, understood as *survivance*, leaves us at the disposal of others. Ipseity and survival, in this schema, take place as the effects of an autoimmunity that problematises the identity, power, purity, and continuity of the life of the living. It is this illogical logic of the living that Francesco Vitale, in a long footnote in *Biodeconstruction*, figures as the catalyst for a debate to come between biodeconstruction and biopolitical thought (Vitale 2018, 232–34n36). Vitale's call to such a debate indicates the need for the consideration of the political import of *survivance* within the framework of biodeconstruction, insofar as he argues that such a debate would be both "necessary and full of repercussions on both sides, in particular, apropos of its possible declinations within a political horizon" (Vitale 2018, 234n36). On the one hand, the implications of autoimmunity that determine life as irreducibly open to alterity and infinitely vulnerable to others would determine life as always-already living *together*, that is, already communal and collective if not also political. In addition, taking seriously Vitale's claim that Derrida's investigation of life is deconstruction's "very matrix" (Vitale 2018, 1) would imply that even the so-called "political" and "ethical" turn(s) in Derrida's thought proceed from this thinking of life, suggesting that if Derrida's work is to be taken to indicate any normative ethical or political content, it is determined by the logic of autoimmune *survivance*. On the other hand, however, despite the apparently explicit political and ethical *thematics* of Derrida's later works—say, *Politics of Friendship* (2005b), *Rogues* (2005c), or *The Animal That Therefore I*

Am (2008)—it is difficult, particularly in regard to politics, to ascribe to them any particular normative claims. Arguably, many of the difficult questions posed by Nancy Fraser, back in 1984 (when the work which would eventually become *Specters of Marx* was but an indefinitely deferred promise), remain to be resolved, and may even be further complicated by Derrida's later works despite their ethical and political themes:

> Does deconstruction have any political implications? Does it have any political significance beyond the byzantine and incestuous struggles it has provoked in American lit crit departments? Is it possible—even desirable—to articulate a deconstructive politics? …Or, is there *already* a politics implicit in his work? And if so, what is it and is it a tenable one? …What sort of political thought remains possible once one has deconstructed all the traditional bases of political reflection? (Fraser 1984, 127–8).

If such questions seem further complicated by the explicitly political content of Derrida's later works, this is precisely due to the continued applicability of her claims *to* those works, even if, from the publication of *Specters of Marx* onward, Derrida supposedly "broke his silence" on the subject of politics. That is to say, the fact that they take politics as their object leaves them open to the charges of "deconstructing politics" and may leave us to ask, again, "what sort of political thought remains possible once one has deconstructed all the traditional bases of political reflection?" As Stella Gaon, after the publication of *Specters of Marx*, and indeed in critiquing Fraser's text, writes,

> With Marx no less than before, Derrida has once again rehearsed his characteristic affirmation of *différance*, that logically impossible condition of possibility that was always, already, there. So if we are to be referred now merely back to that same insistence Derrida has maintained all along… the claim that such an affirmation of an enabling *différance*, such a practice of deconstruction, is not politically "neutral" but "intervenes," this will undoubtedly come as cold comfort to those who had hoped, finally, for something in this work, at least, that would prove to be a little more politically exact. (Gaon 1999, 39)

And, as Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac argue much later in their introduction as editors to *Derrida and the Time of the Political*—a collection framed from the outset as offering "a

critical assessment of Derrida's later work on the political" (2009, 1)—Derrida's "deconstruction of the political field raises a number of difficult questions," one of which concerns the role of "committed action" (2009, 25). That is to say that while it is undeniable that one can identify a set of Derrida's later works as political or *on* the political, determining *a politics* on that basis is not so easy, and certainly not if we understand politics through political decision and action.

More than that, the consequences of autoimmunity in particular for thinking biological life, which also make it necessary to consider the autoimmunity of collective life, appear at the same time to make grasping politics impossible. That is, without the assurances of immunity, we risk putting an end both to the delimitation of a political *space* and to the capacity for political *decision*. A constitutive autoimmunity of collective life means that any other can happen upon us—good or bad, living or dead, assimilable or monstrous—and we would be powerless to do anything about it. As I have argued in the previous two chapters, this is both autoimmunity's chance and threat; life in this schema is only possible insofar as it is insecure and uncertain. But when framed as a question of collective life, this nonpower undermines the presupposed validity of an ethico-political orientation to the other, insofar as it would appear to preclude in advance any possibility of *committed action*, any decision or responsibility, whether in the name of justice to the other or of self-preservation. For it may be the case that all we can say about the arrival of the *tout autre* is that it happens (and indeed even to say that it happens "to us" might be a step too far). As Martin Hägglund argues, "the openness to the future is unconditional in the sense that *everything* (including every system or action) necessarily is open to the future, but it is not unconditional in the sense of a normative ideal" (Hägglund 2008, 231n4); this openness to the other, when determined as the outcome of the logic of autoimmunity, is not an ethical or political injunction but a mere inevitability. The problem, then, is that to begin from this thought of life would mean sacrificing the possibility of security to an infinite openness to the other; not only that there can be no certainty in the face of the other—that is, certainty that we might make the most just decision—but that there can be no decision *at all*.

The affirmation of autoimmunity as the condition for *survivance*—for example, as it takes place in inheritance—might, however, problematise this interpretation, insofar as it

may be precisely what offers something like a "deconstructive *ethics*," even while autoimmunity seems to simply be an inevitability for the living. I have argued, in chapter 1, that Derrida's choice of the word autoimmunity is not insignificant as a nonsynonymous substitute for deconstruction and for so many of its associated terms, such as *différance*, *pharmakon*, and *arche-writing*. Derrida's *preference* for autoimmunity in the contexts in which it appears—first and foremost in analyses of democracy, community, and survival—brings to this matrix of terms an explicit emphasis on death or self-destruction as a necessary possibility for life, and on the unconditionality—in the sense of inevitability—of the vulnerability or nonsovereignty of the self to the intrusion of the other. But, as I developed in chapter 2, autoimmunity and the *survivance* that it enables must be affirmed as the (only) promise of life, even though this promise also takes place as a threat; autoimmunity sustains life only by keeping it "open to something other and more than itself" (Derrida 2002a, 87). This affirmation, moreover, does not amount to a death wish—to recall Derrida's remarks in his last interview:

> I would not want to encourage an interpretation that situates surviving on the side of death and the past rather than the future. No, deconstruction is always on the side of the *yes*, on the side of the affirmation of life. Everything I say—at least from "*Pas*" (in *Parages*) on—about survival as a complication of the opposition life/death proceeds in me from an unconditional affirmation of life. This surviving is life beyond life, life more than life, and my discourse is not a discourse of death, but, on the contrary, the affirmation of a living being who prefers living and thus surviving to death, because survival is not simply that which remains but the most intense life possible. (Derrida 2007a, 51–52)

It is this *affirmation* of autoimmune *survivance* that presents the possibility (or indeed the threat) of a normative dimension to Derrida's work, insofar as this affirmation is always the affirmation of an openness or exposure to the *tout autre*. In accordance with that affirmation, moreover, Derrida's own work likewise cannot fully immunise itself against normative appropriations nor finally eradicate any and every trace of normativity within it. And so we should not be surprised to find this affirmation coming to serve as the locus of the debate around deconstruction's normative force—or desire, or imperative—with many arguing that

it indicates an ethics of deconstruction, and, perhaps with greater disunity among commentators, around its implications for politics.

Much of this debate has centred on Derrida's analysis of hospitality, in which he takes up and departs from the work of Emmanuel Levinas. In Derrida's reading of Levinas, hospitality is "not some region of ethics, let alone… the name of a problem in law or politics: it is ethicity itself, the whole and the principle of ethics" (Derrida 1999, 50). According to Simon Critchley, Derrida affirms "the primacy of an ethics of hospitality," while also distancing himself from Levinas's deduction of politics from this primary ethics, introducing a "*hiatus* between ethics and politics" (Critchley 2014, 308). For Critchley, deconstruction can be understood "as an ethical demand which provides a compelling account of responsibility as an affirmation of alterity, of the otherness of the Other: 'Yes, to the stranger' " (Critchley 2014, 189). Beyond this point, however, deconstruction meets an impasse in moving from ethics to politics, the way out of which, Critchley argues, can be retrieved in returning to the work of Levinas (Critchley 2014, 189–90). Drucilla Cornell provides a similar argument regarding the ethical content of Derrida's work and its relation to that of Levinas, finding that Derrida's critique of Levinas is not a refusal of the ethical relation found there but an attempt to "salvage" it "from potential degeneration into the very violence toward otherness that the philosophy of alterity attempts to guard against" (Cornell 1992, 64). What she calls—in place of "deconstruction," which too easily lends itself to a limited understanding as a practice of reading—"the philosophy of the limit," she argues,

> is driven by an ethical desire to enact the ethical relation… By the ethical relation I mean to indicate the aspiration to a nonviolent relationship to the Other, and to otherness more generally, that assumes responsibility to guard the Other against the appropriation that would deny her difference and singularity. (Cornell 1992, 62)

It is on this basis that Cornell then argues for the political significance of the philosophy of the limit, not merely in the form of the deconstruction of law to show its violence—i.e., deconstruction as a critical reading practice that can "only give us the politics of suspicion"—but as a philosophy that offers a "politics of utopian possibility," and "protects the possibility of radical legal transformation" (Cornell 1992, 156). Thus while Cornell and Critchley's

accounts diverge significantly in their treatment of politics, and in the details of their engagement with Derrida's reading of Levinas, they nonetheless both identify the ethical content of deconstruction in the aspiration to a nonviolent affirmation of the other as responsibility, which takes place in and through hospitality, i.e., through welcoming the other, while guarding against appropriating the other as the same—in short, welcoming the other *as* singularly and irreducibly other. Responsibility, for both authors, is therefore always doubled, referring both to shouldering the burden of guarding the other's difference, and to responding in the affirmative.

Both Critchley's and Cornell's accounts also identify a certain desire in relation to Derrida's discourse on community, particularly as it relates to the affirmation of alterity. Derrida's rare evocations of community are hesitant and indeed often reluctant. This resistance to community lies with its implications of both unity and delimitation; the implication of "a harmonious group, consensus, and fundamental agreement" (Derrida 1995b, 355), of "participation, indeed fusion, identification" (1995a, 46), of "a unity of languages, of cultural, ethnic, or religious horizons," and the "schema of identity" (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 66). In conversation with Maurizio Ferraris, Derrida states, "if I have always hesitated to use this word, it is because too often the word 'community' resounds with the 'common' [*commun*], the as-one [*comme-un*]" (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 25). According to Derrida, the unity implied in community itself endangers the possibility of politics; "the privilege granted to unity, to totality, to organic ensembles, to community as a homogenized whole—this is a danger for responsibility, for decision, for ethics, for politics" (Derrida 1997a, 13). Community, understood in such terms of unity and closure, would cut against the affirmation of the other identified in Cornell and Critchley's accounts. However, Cornell argues that Derrida does not "totally reject the *aspiration* to the ideal of community" and, speaking of Derrida's apparent alignment with Adorno, proposes that "the space that they [both] keep open for difference and particularity would itself not make any sense unless we are sensitive to the seriousness with which they take the ideal of community" (Cornell 1992, 40). Critchley does not strictly speaking contest this aspiration, but questions its sufficiency for articulating a just conception of politics, asking:

> What meaning can community take on in difference without reducing difference? That is, the question of politics… becomes a question of how the community can remain a place for commonality that is respectful of difference and resists the closure implicit in totalitarianism and immanentism. What conception of politics would be necessary in order to maintain this thought of community? This is the question. (Critchley 2014, 219)

For Critchley, deconstruction confronts its limit here, at community: *if* there is a desire for community in Derrida's work—one that is responsible to the other—this desire calls for another conception of politics, which deconstruction cannot offer. That is to say, deconstruction's hesitancy on the threshold of community cannot be overcome without recourse to a reinvention of politics to guide it. Both Cornell and Critchley, then, in their respective ethical readings of Derrida, leave a space open for politics to be invented; Cornell's "politics of utopian possibility" refers precisely to remaining open to radical transformation, and Critchley determines that a just conception of politics must come from outside of deconstruction if it is to resist the closure of community. That is to say, finally, that neither locate *in* Derrida's discourse of hospitality a politics of the sort that would satisfy critics such as Fraser—politics as "a matter of just those contingent but warrantable normative judgements about… historically and culturally viable practices and institutions" (Fraser 1997, 159). But the affirmation of autoimmunity apparent in Derrida's later works, along with recent reinterpretations of the significance of autoimmunity—in biodeconstruction as well as Hägglund's work—should prompt further reflection on the normative potential of autoimmunity, particularly as it relates to the concept of hospitality.

There are two key passages, from *Rogues* and *Of Hospitality*, that can guide a reading of autoimmunity as unconditional hospitality, particularly insofar as they indicate the modality and temporality of its affirmation, and, as a result, its potential for a normative reading of autoimmune *survivance* as a logic of life. I have already addressed the passage from *Rogues* in regards to autoimmunity's chance and threat in previous chapters;

> If an event worthy of this name is to arrive or happen, it must, beyond all mastery, affect a passivity. It must touch an exposed vulnerability, one without absolute immunity, without indemnity; it must touch this vulnerability in its finitude and in

> a nonhorizontal fashion, there where it is not yet or is already no longer possible to face up to the unforeseeability of the other. In this regard, autoimmunity is not an absolute ill or evil. It enables an exposure to the other, to *what* and to *who* comes—which means that it must remain incalculable. Without autoimmunity, we would no longer wait, await, or expect, no longer expect one another, or expect any event. (Derrida 2005c, 152)

The other, from *Of Hospitality*, is a short passage which draws together many of the facets of hospitality that are central to this line of questioning; it underscores that the "other" to which or to whom hospitality is extended need not be another person or indeed even a living being; it describes what Derrida calls "*the* law of hospitality," which transgresses and is transgressed by "the laws of hospitality" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 77); when read alongside the above passage from *Rogues*, it more readily ascribes an affirmative and even apparently ethical dimension to this autoimmune exposure to the other; and, finally, it underscores the specific temporal dimension of this affirmation. The apparent injunction is as follows:

> Let us say yes *to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 77)

For Derrida, conditional hospitality and unconditional hospitality are two contradictory imperatives; conditional hospitality refers to what appears to take place every day, by way of the "laws of hospitality," rights, judgements, and so on, whereas unconditional hospitality refers to this "yes" to anyone, no matter whom. In other words, unconditional hospitality is another name for an infinite exposure to the other—that is, autoimmunity—that occurs before any possibility of recognition, and thus before any choice, decision, border controls, or passport checks—in short, before any conditions may be applied to neutralise its force.

Unconditional hospitality is, therefore, impossible to enact "as such," for structural rather than ethical reasons. Hospitality takes place only in and through conditional judgements, on the basis of one's own sovereignty over the territory into which one invites

the other. Such limitations are necessary first of all for the reason that what or who arrives could always be a mortal threat—as Richard Kearney points out, unconditional hospitality "seems to preclude our need to differentiate between good and evil aliens, between benign and malign strangers, between saints and psychopaths" (Kearney 1999, 260). But this is just a risk, rather than an impossibility strictly speaking, although it might turn out to be one—for example, if the "evil alien" we welcome wants us dead. If unconditional hospitality puts an end to *us*, then it also puts an end to any hospitality we could offer. Such a possibility is inscribed into the very word "hospitality," in the ambivalence of *hostis* and *hospes*, hospitality being derived from *hospes* (which itself has the multiple meanings of "host" and "guest"), but which in turn derives from *hostis*, which can refer to a stranger, but also an enemy, and from which we derive "hostile" and related, less hospitable, terms. Hosting can mean offering a gift of hospitality or extending an invitation, to be sure, but it can also mean housing an undesirable parasite, which makes itself "at home" or even makes of oneself its home. In this case, being a "host" is not an (intentional) act of generosity but an encroachment on the very sovereignty that would make such acts possible. Moreover, this possibility is always there "in" hospitality, a necessary possibility for any welcome. On this point, Derrida writes, "anyone who encroaches on my 'at home,' on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. This other becomes a hostile subject, and I risk becoming their hostage" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 55). Thus hospitality must *always* be limited, at the risk of surrendering one's authority status as "master of the house" in the surrender of one's property or identity (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 73; Caputo in Derrida 1997a, 111)—*without which there could be no invitation at all*. An unconditional hospitality, properly speaking, would annul the possibility of hospitality "itself," precisely by putting an end to the authority by which we could welcome anyone. Such a gesture at its most hyperbolic would transform the "territory" or the home into merely public space—where any other could enter, and perhaps, even, lay claim to it. A pure unconditional hospitality, Derrida argues, is therefore "inaccessible" for structural reasons, "barred" by its "internal contradictions" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 149). In an altogether autoimmune fashion, hospitality thus proceeds by putting an end to itself; it must be halted or deferred in order to maintain its very possibility, by protecting the inviolable immunity of the territory into which one invites the other.

Despite the impossibility of unconditional hospitality, Derrida claims that anything else would enact a certain kind of injustice: "from the very threshold of the right to hospitality," he writes, "injustice, a certain injustice, and even a certain perjury, begins right away" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 55). Once determined by *right*, hospitality is neutralised in advance insofar as it becomes, from the outset, conditional—for example, on one's status as "human," which, as Judith Butler and many others have pointed out, "presupposes that we have first settled the question of who does and does not count as a human" (Butler 2006, 91). Dehumanisation—and, as Cary Wolfe adds, dehumanisation via the mechanism of "animalization"—remains available to justify the denial of such rights to "*whatever* body happens to fall outside the ethnocentric 'we,' " animal or otherwise (Wolfe 2013, 21). Insofar as any one group's humanity can be rendered dubious—and Butler argues that the dehumanisation of populations is the *condition* for the production of the human (Butler 2006, 91)—the codification of justice into "human rights" always permits the retraction or denial of such rights. Thus a right to hospitality betrays the principle of unlimited hospitality while feigning at, or more generously, striving for universality; not because it *is not* extended to all others, but because the concept of right, in its very principle, presupposes that rights belong, even "unconditionally," to some at the expense of others. Hence the apparent desire for unconditional hospitality: notwithstanding the seemingly dispassionate, transcendental tone of the passage from *Rogues*, the "let us say yes" from *Of Hospitality* appears not merely to enact an affirmation, but moreover to ascribe to this unconditional openness to the other a sense both of *choice* and of *justice* that demands a degree of commitment.

In Hägglund's reading, however, the passage from *Rogues* is not a prescription, but a constative description of the affirmation of life's finitude that is, as noted above, unconditional only in the sense that "we have no choice" (Hägglund 2008, 30–31; 231n4). Certainly autoimmunity, as an "exposed vulnerability," lends itself to this interpretation. Hägglund writes:

> This passage reiterates one of the most persistent claims in Derrida's writings, that there *must* be exposition to an unpredictable future, there *must* be finitude and

> vulnerability, there *must* be openness to whatever or whoever comes. The failure to understand the status of this "must" has given rise to a number of influential misreadings… [whose] common denominator is that they ascribe a normative dimension to Derrida's argument. (Hägglund 2008, 31).

Among the authors of such "influential misreadings" that he criticises in the course of his book, Hägglund includes Critchley and Cornell, alongside John D. Caputo and several others (Hägglund 2008, 212n14). "The mistake," he argues, is "to assume that one can derive a normative affirmation of the future from the unconditional 'yes' to the coming of the future" (231–232n4). Hägglund is attentive to the fact that the "other," even in hospitality, should not be understood only to refer to another person, but to the *tout autre* as such—not merely people, but animals, women, events—in short, the future, with all that it promises and threatens (Hägglund 2008, 103). This understanding is, on the one hand, what allows him to pay careful attention to the temporal structure of this affirmation in a way that is often missed in accounts of hospitality, and, on the other, what permits him to disregard the specific modality of the words used to describe this affirmation, insofar as for Hägglund they are all names for the inevitable, rather than chosen, affirmation of life's temporal structure—i.e., life as *survivance*. And so there are two positions to follow here on the subject of autoimmunity's potential normative force: firstly, Hägglund's, that this affirmation is no affirmation at all, and no normative claims can be derived from it; and secondly, Cornell's and Critchley's, who, although they differ on the subject of politics, agree that a normative demand—albeit one limited to ethics—can be derived from the affirmation of alterity. I follow Hägglund's lead in attending to the temporality of this affirmation of alterity, through unconditional hospitality and autoimmunity. On the basis of this reading, we will find these latter terms to be yet more "nonsynonymous substitutes," which is to say different names for "the" "same" "thing." However, departing from Hägglund, I argue that it is in these differences—between one affirmation and another, in the "spacing" or temporal structure of the affirmation of alterity, and between two words for the same thing—that we can identify the normative force of the affirmation of life as *survivance*.

Hägglund signals the necessity of rethinking the affirmation, or the "yes," of hospitality both in terms of its temporality and as another word for autoimmunity. By doing

so, he shows that "*nothing happens* without the unconditional hospitality of visitation" (Hägglund 2008, 104); that is, that an affirmation of unconditional hospitality is nothing other than what lets the other or the future arrive at all. Accordingly, the "yes" to who or what turns up is not and cannot be the "yes" or "welcome" that takes place in recognition and response, but is something other and more "originary," which would precede and condition any "yes" or "welcome" to the other. This affirmation thus takes place before we are able to respond to the other with a second "yes," with a "yes, but only if…" or indeed with a "no." We could not give any such response to the other were it not capable of soliciting one from us—i.e., moving us to respond—which already marks a certain trespass of the phantasmatic immunity by which we offer conditional hospitality. All of this is to say that the very possibility of any relation to the other is structured *in advance* by the vulnerability instituted by autoimmune life; that is, that we are always-already at the disposal of others, living together without immune assurances. No conditional hospitality would be possible without this "yes," and at the same time, no conditions can, once and for all, put an end to it:

> We can thus see why Derrida says that unconditional hospitality is at once indissociable from *and* heterogeneous to conditional hospitality. On the one hand, unconditional hospitality is *indissociable* from conditional hospitality, since it is the exposure to the visitation of others that makes it necessary to establish conditions of hospitality, to regulate who is allowed to enter. On the other hand, unconditional hospitality is *heterogeneous* to conditional hospitality, since no regulation finally can master the exposure to the visitation of others. (Hägglund 2008, 104)

Derrida's analysis, however, multiplies the folds of this indissociability. It is not only the case that unconditional hospitality precedes and makes possible conditional hospitality, which only occurs *after* the arrival of the other (thus after identification, recognition, and so on). Hospitality takes place, instead, as a decision that inhabits the aporia between two contradictory imperatives that, Derrida argues, should not be understood as "moments of hospitality" (Derrida 2002a, 362), one first and then the other. Instead, he writes, "hospitality must wait *and* not wait," in or between "attention *and* inattention" (Derrida 2002a, 360). This is to say that hospitality takes place in the "spacing"—the difference and deferral, but also the indissociability—of this "first" indiscriminate "yes" to who or what

turns up, and a "yes" that is attentive and responsible to the alterity and singularity of the other. That they are indissociable cuts both ways, according to Derrida's analysis: it is not only that unconditional hospitality, without the "later" enactment of conditions, poses a threat to the safety and the very existence of the host, but more than that—impossibly, counterintuitively—unconditional hospitality is *conditioned* by the conditional hospitality that it makes possible.

For this "first" "yes," Derrida writes, "does not describe and does not state anything, but engages a kind of arche-engagement, a kind of alliance or consent or promise" (Derrida 1988, 129). Every "yes," he argues, is "immediately double, immediately 'yes-yes' " (Derrida 2002b, 247). As Hägglund rightly notes, "the interval that divides the moment of the 'yes'—the spacing of time that is intrinsic to affirmation as such—opens it to being forgotten, derided, or otherwise negated" (Hägglund 2008, 35). It is, however, also what divides the "unconditional" yes, making it dependent on the conditional hospitality that it makes possible. The "yes," Derrida writes,

> is neither a descriptive observation nor a theoretical judgment; it is precisely an affirmation, with the performative characteristics that any affirmation entails. The "yes" must also be a reply, a reply in the form of a promise. From the moment that the "yes" is a reply, it must be addressed to the other, from the moment that it is a promise, it pledges to confirm what has been said. If I say "yes" to you, I have already repeated it the first time, since the first "yes" is also a promise of this "yes" being repeated. To say "yes" is to acquiesce, to pledge, and therefore to repeat. To say "yes" is an obligation to repeat. This pledge to repeat is implied in the structure of the most simple "yes." There is a time and a spacing of the "yes" as "yes-yes": it takes time to say "yes." (Derrida 2002b, 247)

This is the other side of the indissociability of conditional and unconditional hospitality; there is no "first" yes without the promise of repetition—in the future—and without having always-already been a response to the demand of the other. That is, while the "first" yes is indeed the vulnerability or opening by which the other comes to affect us or move us to respond, it is "itself" conditioned in advance by the future "yes" that it promises, without which it could not take place. The "yes," and indeed *any* "yes" is, necessarily and by

definition, a response to some other demand placed on us—even while it is what enacts the promise *to* respond in a second, spoken yes. The first "yes" promises a second "yes"—which is to say that the first "yes" only takes place *as* the promise of a second. Which would make this first, arche-originary or quasi-transcendental "yes" *firstly second*, that is, only occurring on the condition of the second "yes" still to come, which is "*a priori* enveloped in the 'first' " (Derrida 1988, 131). Every "yes" is thus doubled in advance, repeated and recited as "yes, yes" in the event of any affirmative act of hospitality. It is not just the case that unconditional hospitality—whether thought in terms of vulnerability or affirmation—is what makes conditional hospitality possible, but that the unconditional is conditioned by the possibility of a determinate act of hospitality—even while this necessity also comes with the constitutive possibilities of forgetting or rejection. As Derrida writes elsewhere:

> I cannot open the door, I cannot expose myself to the coming of the other and offer him or her anything whatsoever without making this hospitality effective, without in some concrete way, giving *something determinate*. This determination will thus have to reinscribe the unconditional into certain conditions. Otherwise it gives nothing… Political, juridical, and ethical responsibilities have their place, if they take place, only in this transaction—which is each time unique, like an event—between these two hospitalities, the unconditional and the conditional. (Derrida 2003, 129–30)

The structure of the "yes, yes" operates according to the same movement characterising hospitality's two non-successive moments. The first yes—that of unconditional hospitality—is enacted as the promise to or alliance with the other, and takes place in or after the second "yes"—that of conditional hospitality—which is the "yes" that we repeat to the other.

This also helps us to uncover the particular modality of unconditional hospitality's "yes" as always divided in itself. On the one hand, this "yes" is an inevitable vulnerability instituted by autoimmunity, coming to us from the other, rather than emerging as the choice of a sovereign *ipse*; and on the other, it is an impossible promise to say yes to any other, and to be attentive and even responsible to the other's very alterity. Hospitality proceeds according to the same aporetic structure as inheritance, in the double sense of "one must [*il faut*]." Hospitality comes to us first of all from the other, and must be affirmed before any decision to make good (or not) on our promise. Indeed, as Michael Naas argues, the threat of

contamination, whether contamination of the "self" or "community" by the other, the contamination of this promise by forgetting, negation, and so on, or the contamination of the names in Derrida's discourse *for* this possibility of contamination by the (often-normative) legacies they inherit,

> is also the deconstructive lever of intervention and the reason why Derrida can and often does speak not of deriving these names from his discourse but of a kind of preference or hope in relation to them. Unable to deduce a politics or ethics from the constative description of this universal structure, Derrida resorts to other modalities of speech when it comes to affirming a future—preference, hope, promise, and so on. (Naas 2013, 123)

That is to say that Hägglund does not misinterpret Derrida in arguing that "the mistake is to assume that one can derive a normative affirmation of the future from the unconditional 'yes' to the future that Derrida analyses as inherent in every system or action" (Hägglund 2013, 106). Rather, the unconditional "yes" to the future *requires* an affirmation of the future, something like a hope or a desire to make good on the promise, in remaining open to the *tout autre* and the future to-come. If hospitality were merely a matter of the other coming to us, with no response or initiative on our part, there would be no hospitality, unconditional or otherwise, as Derrida argues:

> If I welcome the other out of mere duty, unwillingly, against my natural inclination, and therefore without smiling, I am not welcoming him either: One must [*il faut*] therefore welcome without "one must" [*sans "il faut"*]: neither naturally nor unnaturally… If, in hospitality, one must say *yes*, welcome the coming [*acceuillir la venue*], [then] say the "welcome"; one must say *yes*, there where one does not wait, *yes*, there where one does not expect, nor await oneself to, the other [*là où l'on ne s'attend pas soi-même à l'autre*], to let oneself be swept by the coming of the wholly other, the absolutely unforeseeable [*inanticipable*] stranger, the uninvited visitor, the unexpected visitation beyond welcoming apparatuses. (Derrida 2002a, 361–62)

This "one must" always signals both the inevitability of a "yes" to the other, but also that "*one must* filter, sift, criticize…" (Derrida 2006, 18). Like in inheritance, "it is not the case

that choice has disappeared altogether from the scene… there are different ways this can be carried out" (Haddad 2013, 32). In the same way that one may not "know how to reaffirm" an inherited legacy, one can always fail to be responsible to the other, and fail to "guard the Other against the appropriation that would deny her difference and singularity" (Cornell 1992, 62). The unconditionality of hospitality's demand, as Stella Gaon argues in relation to the gift, "does not stem from beyond it," and "cannot be mobilized unless it is simultaneously betrayed" (Gaon 2018, 206), precisely through making it "concrete," "determined," and inevitably conditional. As Gaon further argues, "the imperative (*il faut*) of deconstructive readings is always situated here," in the "aporetic promise and thus the logical im-possibility that is already embedded *in* the concepts of 'hospitality,' the 'gift,' 'forgiveness,' and the 'law' (for example)" (Gaon 2018, 206). There is something of a weak normative force here, in the imperative to do the impossible; to "say *yes*" to anyone, no matter whom, which can never be resolved fully into a "pure" uncontaminated hospitality, nor a pious respect for every other, even those who might do us harm, nor, finally, a pure vulnerability to who or what comes. Thus, Gaon argues, "what is normative about deconstruction is so only in a qualified sense"; if we are enjoined to do anything, it is only "to attend to the violence that eradicates (or seeks to eradicate) difference" (Gaon 2018, 206). If there is any normative content to hospitality as another name for autoimmunity, it is only to maintain the aporetic promise that inhabits hospitality's "yes"—to maintain it in the difference or spacing between the "first" inevitable affirmation and the "second" reaffirmation without which the first would be nothing, and between the impossibility of welcoming any other and the normative injunction to welcome any other that the name "hospitality" inherits. Hospitality, like so many other inherited names in deconstruction, must be thought as the name of a promise: "not as an alternative possibility for what exists or might exist" (Naas 2013, 123), but as an opening to who or what comes, in pledging not only to say yes, but to follow it up, to reaffirm the yes with another.

This affirmation is not nothing. For Derrida, it opens the space of ethics and politics: "Ethics, politics, and responsibility, *if there are any*, will only ever have begun with the experience and experiment of the aporia" (Derrida 1992b, 41). This opening, of course, carries a double sense; the affirmation that takes place in the aporia is what makes it possible to respond—ethically, politically—to the arrival of the other; at the same time, since it takes

place before all recognition or decidability—before any certainty—it renders ethics and politics liable to contamination. For Derrida, it is the very uncertainty or undecidability regarding the other or the future that makes a response or decision possible and necessary, but, at the same time, open to betrayal, forgetting, and injustice. The fact that a response is necessary does not therefore imply that such a response will necessarily be *responsible* to the other, which is to say, would take up the responsibility to guard the other's difference against appropriation. Nor does it assure that we will be safe *from* the other; nor, finally, does it dictate anything about what this response should look like.

For David Newheiser, however, this very uncertainty is not only the opening of ethics and politics, but the mark of *an* ethics that he identifies in Derrida's work, one that in turn allows for political commitments to be sustained. For Newheiser, Derrida's work evinces an "ethics of uncertainty" in insistently attending to the instability and self-difference that inheres not only in concepts such as community and hospitality but in the concept of concept itself (Newheiser 2019, 19). Newheiser traces this ethics through Derrida's works well before the ostensible "ethical" or "political" turn (2019, 19–25), and argues that Derrida's attentivity to the instability of the concept is itself an "ethical practice" insofar as it sustains hope for transformation; Derrida's "discursive negativity" and insistence on critique "functions as an ethical practice of openness to the unexpected" (2019, 156). For Newheiser, this practice can be said to constitute an ethics insofar as it looks to preserve the (im)possibility of justice. In the first place, he argues, it sustains a hope for an impossible and incalculable justice that always remains to-come (2019, 26, 31). At the same time, this discipline of hope sustains urgent work *on* the present—driving engagement with and rectification of specific injustices as "justly as possible," while at the same time remaining "open to revising one's decision," since "one can never be sure that one has decided well" (2019, 31).

Hospitality serves as an example of this ethics at work—or, more accurately, this ethics works in and through hospitality. That we desire hospitality despite its lack of assurance or even possibility, for Newheiser, elaborates the ethical posture of deconstruction in contrast to the ostensibly unethical alternatives; closure, complacency, and despair (Newheiser 2019, 122, 102–3). While Hägglund argues that "the command to 'respect' the

alterity of the other does not make any sense if the other wants to destroy me," Newheiser responds that for Derrida, "hospitality may nevertheless be pursued, for desire is not restricted to that which is safe" (Newheiser 2019, 123). Indeed, Derrida explicitly aligns desire *with* the impossible:

> What I am interested in is the experience of the desire for the impossible. That is, the impossible as the condition of desire… I mean this quest in which we want to give, even when we realize, when we agree, if we agree, that the gift, that giving, is impossible, that it is a process of reappropriation and self-destruction. Nevertheless, we do not give up the dream of the pure gift, in the same way that we do not give up the idea of pure hospitality. Even if we know that it is impossible and that it can be perverse… If we try to draw a politics of hospitality from the dream of unconditional hospitality, not only will that be impossible but it will have perverse consequences. So despite this perversion, despite this impossibility, we go on dreaming or thinking of pure hospitality, of pure gift… We continue to desire, to dream, *through* the impossible. (Derrida and Marion 1999, 72).

As Newheiser puts it, "pure hospitality cannot be instantiated, and for this reason it is impossible. However… impossibility functions not to exclude desire, as Hägglund would have it, but to inflame passion all the more" (Newheiser 2019, 123). To extend Newheiser's argument, we could suggest that to desire only that which is possible would preclude any hospitality at all, insofar as hospitality requires the impossible; hospitality takes place in deciding to welcome the other *before* any decision is possible. The fact that we do so, for Newheiser, evinces a discipline of hope that allows us not only to affirm the other before all recognition or decidability, but also to reaffirm our decision—or critique it, which might mean deciding that our decision was, in retrospect, unjust. The impossible, for Newheiser, can be desired and pursued, but not with any assurances or certainty in doing so; the double movement of the affirmation of an impossible hospitality or a justice that remains to-come, along with the reaffirmation in the present of our uncertain decisions—even while we may betray or be betrayed by such affirmations—constitutes the ethicality of being open to the other. In placing hospitality at the centre of ethics, as "essential to ethical relation" (2019, 122), Newheiser makes the desire for the impossible not only exemplary of but necessary to this "ethics of uncertainty."

This reading is consistent with Derrida's remarks on responsibility and decision in relation to a justice that remains to come. This "hopeful" political interpretation is perhaps most evident in *Specters of Marx*, in which Derrida argues that insofar as there is a promise of political justice ("a democratic promise" or a "communist promise") it must "always keep within it… this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart" (Derrida 2006, 81). Without hospitality as the experience of the impossible, he argues, "one might as well give up on both justice and the event… One might as well give up also on whatever good conscience one still claims to preserve" (2006, 82). Indeed for Derrida it is the experience of the impossible, and the very lack of decidability, that opens the space of ethics and politics:

> Ethics, politics, and responsibility, *if there are any*, will only ever have begun with the experience and experiment of the aporia. When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make: irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program. (Derrida 1992b, 41)

Of course, this makes even less clear what we *ought* to do. Newheiser's "ethics of uncertainty" certainly avoids the risks of a "deconstructive ethics" that Derrida warns against: "A consensual euphoria or, worse, a community of complacent deconstructionists, reassured and reconciled with the world in ethical certainty, good conscience, satisfaction of service rendered, and the consciousness of duty accomplished (or, more heroically still, yet to be accomplished)" (Derrida 1995a, 17). By the same token, we might question whether or not we would want to describe such an uncertain affirmation as "an ethics," or as evidence *of* an ethics, let alone as evidence of a politics in Fraser's sense. That is, should ethics be understood in terms of normative principles that allow decisions to be made—with if not full ethical certainty, then at least "good conscience"—affirming the uncertainty of any decision and nurturing an "undetermined messianic promise" cannot hope to meet this standard. It is for this reason that Geoffrey Bennington argues that "ethics is metaphysical through and through and can therefore never simply be assumed or affirmed in deconstruction. The demand or desire for a 'deconstructive ethics' is in this sense doomed to be disappointed" (Bennington 2000, 64). Many of the questions that Derrida attempts to hold open, such as "What is the ethicity of ethics? The morality of morality? What is responsibility?" must, "in a

certain way," he argues, "remain urgent and unanswered, at any rate without a general and rule-governed response" (Derrida 1995a, 16). Moreover, he insists that we should not assume that such questions are "*already* inspired"—which is to say, first and foremost—"by a concern that could by right be called ethical, moral, responsible, etc." (Derrida 1995a, 17). As Derrida argues in *Rogues*,

> The responsibility of what remains to be decided or done (in actuality) cannot consist in following, applying, or carrying out a norm or a rule. Wherever I have at my disposal a determinable rule, I know what must be done, and as soon as such knowledge dictates the law, action follows knowledge as a calculable consequence: one *knows* what path to take, one no longer hesitates. The decision then no longer decides anything but is made in advance and is thus in advance annulled. It is simply deployed, without delay, presently, with the automatism attributed to machines. There is no longer any place for justice or responsibility (whether juridical, political, or ethical). (Derrida 2005c, 84–85)

In this sense, an authoritative "ethics" or "politics" would be precisely what prevents any (ethical or political) responsibility from taking place, insofar as it would put an end to the uncertainty and undecidability that would otherwise inhabit any decision. Following or having "an ethics," in this sense, means closure, if not necessarily to "others" as other living beings then to other possibilities for justice that remain to be invented when an event calls for it. Any ethical or political responsibility, for Derrida, cannot proceed from a position of certainty. To act on the basis of preserving and affirming uncertainty, insisting on "never [being] sure that one has decided well" (Newheiser 2019, 31), would thus mean putting aside if not ethics "itself" then at least a certain view of ethics as a program for responsible action.

Perhaps, then, the most "ethically just" stance to take would be, counterintuitively, one which is "against ethics," as John D. Caputo has proposed (1993). In *Against Ethics*, Caputo proceeds from a similar thought of uncertainty; that judgement, decision, and obligation are always fraught with danger. Ethics, on the other hand, "makes safe":

> It throws a net of safety under the judgements we are forced to make, the daily, hourly decisions that make up the texture of our lives. Ethics lays the foundations for

> principles that force people to be good; it clarifies concepts, secures judgements, provides firm guardrails along the slippery slopes of factical life. It provides principles and criteria and adjudicates hard cases. Ethics is altogether wholesome, constructive work, which is why it enjoys a good name. (Caputo 1993, 4)

For this reason, while ethics may be reassuring, for Caputo it is insufficient, and as such poses its own set of dangers, leading him to argue not for a philosophical redefinition of ethics, or the pursuit of an originary ethics, but to come out against ethics altogether (Caputo 1993, 1–3). Ethics is dangerous, in the first instance, because it can sometimes lead to injustices—since deciding, in any event and with or without ethics, can always be wrong as well. Caputo's problem with ethics, though, is not only that it provides an assurance of safety—or justice—where there is none, but that in order to do so it must exclude or disavow the fundamentally troubling nature of obligation, which, he claims, is "a more difficult, risky business than ethics would allow" (Caputo 1993, 4). Deconstructing ethics, Caputo claims, "cuts this net" of certainty, and "sets obligation loose from its containment or confinement or, better, lets that being-let-loose be seen, even as it exposes the vulnerability, the frailty and fragility of obligation. It lets obligation be even as it lets it in for trouble, exposing it to disaster" (1993, 4, 5).

Against ethics, Caputo proposes instead to make "small, inconclusive, fragmentary contributions" to a "poetics of obligation" (Caputo 1993, 21). In this way, he begins with what he calls the "fact (as it were)" of obligation—the fact that we find ourselves subject to obligations, through no particular choice or power of our own (1993, 21). Beginning here, rather than with ethics—either premised on rules or virtues—underscores the groundlessness and undecidability of obligation; obligation simply "happens," and we are always in the midst of obligations that call for a response, each of them singular and particular to the event or situation that we find ourselves in (Caputo 1993, 6–7). In doing so, Caputo reorients a focus toward the limits of ethics, both in the sense that for Caputo as for Derrida, following a set of ethical norms leaves no room for justice or responsible decision, but also that ethics—along with the institutions in which it is made manifest, such as the law—cannot be responsible to those others who fall outside of its limits or are unrecognisable as its subjects. For ethics to enjoy its "good name," and to provide assurances of certainty where there is

none, for Caputo, not only permits but *requires* that obligation be expelled, or, at the very least, obscured (Caputo 1993, 5).

By this standard, we could suggest—perhaps unfairly—that Newheiser's redeployment of the name of ethics for something far less certain than ethics properly speaking might *itself* provide too much assurance, if not of "the consciousness of duty accomplished," then perhaps that of a duty or justice "yet to be accomplished" (Derrida 1995a, 17). However, in pursuing the deconstruction of ethics, Caputo affirms a position strikingly similar to Newheiser's, and indeed Caputo even notes that

> the deconstruction of ethics I am undertaking here… could be said, in virtue of the need for double writing, to issue in a more radical, decentred, disseminated ethics, an "ethics of dissemination," and we would use the word "ethics" *sous rature*. That is how I could make my peace with the word "ethics," the result being a kind of quasi ethics. (Caputo 1993, 103)

Perhaps, then, even while in Newheiser's own treatment of the term, "ethics" escapes unscathed, his insistence on holding "affirmation and negation in tension in order to resist the danger of complacency and despair" (Newheiser 2019, 86) could be understood to apply to the name of "ethics" as well. Indeed Newheiser's "ethics of uncertainty" can be seen to unsettle itself, insistently, even autoimmunely. Notwithstanding his appeal to the "good name" of ethics, that is, the manner in which Newheiser articulates this ethics underscores its pervertibility and even self-negation. It would be consistent with the possibility of an ethics *sous rature*: negated in that it refuses to settle into an ethics proper as a self-assured program for action, but affirmed insofar as the name perhaps nurtures a promise for something *other than*, or even "more ethical" than ethics. Indeed as Bennington suggests, " 'ethics' too might always provide deconstruction with resources repressed or left unexploited by its metaphysical determination, and these resources might then be shown to be in some way 'more powerful' than that metaphysical determination, in excess of it" (Bennington 2000, 65). The usefulness of Caputo's account, then, is not that it provides ammunition to shut down the use of the word, or to dismiss Newheiser's account as too pious or too sure of its hopes. Rather, what *Against Ethics* offers here is a supplement (or unexploited resource) that, for Caputo, is lodged in ethics, which "deconstructs" ethics, and which the deconstruction of

ethics might let loose: obligation. This stance "against ethics" in favour of obligation, that is, might be an appropriate supplement to Newheiser's attempt to think the normative implications of hospitality. Moreover, this stance against ethics, I want to suggest, might in turn serve as a basis for thinking through such uncertain implications as they pertain to or derive from the specific significance of autoimmunity in Derrida's later works and the thought of collective life that it engenders. By this I mean that Caputo's account of obligation offers resources for articulating the "political significance" of autoimmunity beyond mere diagnosis, even while *Against Ethics* does not (and cannot, given its date of publication) itself take Derrida's use of the term "autoimmunity" into account. This, too, will disappoint the search for a normative and empirical politics *in* Derrida's discourse on autoimmunity or its affirmation, but it might permit, or even promise, the pursuit of a (bio)politics—an affirmative one, at that—of *survivance*.

By beginning from obligation rather than ethics, and with "constant reference to deconstruction," Caputo opens the possibility for a different thought of responsibility to the other, one that is compatible with Derrida's analysis of hospitality, the yes, and autoimmunity. "What a poetics of obligation brings out and where it starts," he writes, is that obligation is

> a matter of being claimed, in which something has a hold on us, something that is older than us, that has us before we have it… It is not an effect produced by a subject, not the work of a subject, but rather something produced in me, as in a patient, something that happens to me. (Caputo 1993, 31–32)

That is, obligations happen in any event, when any other arrives, no matter how small or insignificant, and call for a response. Moreover, obligation turns on what Caputo calls "the power of powerlessness": obligation comes to us first of all from the other, rather than from some higher power, law, or demand, and "grows in strength directly in proportion to the desperateness of the situation of the other" (Caputo 1993, 5). In this way, Caputo claims to align himself with Derrida and to distance himself from Levinas, arguing that "the call that calls to me from the Other, say from the child who suffers needlessly, is finite and fragile, not infinite and absolute" (1993, 85); since obligation's appeal is not "an instance of the Law," a

categorical demand, or any other kind of appeal that comes with authority, it can always be refused or betrayed (1993, 85, 38–39). This emphasis on the fragility of the other's call, however, is not to promote a decisionistic view of things—that because obligations lack authority, we can simply choose the right ones to respond to—in fact, it seeks the opposite, to "find an idiom for the fact (as it were) that we are laid hold of by others, seized and laid claim to" (Caputo 1993, 32), always on the receiving end of obligations that are urgent, undecidable, and that we might always *fail* to respond adequately to (no matter how hard we try). This draws out what Geoffrey Bennington describes as the "radicalization by Derrida of Levinas's thought" (Bennington 2000, 74): that "if we are to talk intelligibly of decisions and responsibilities, then we must recognize that they take place *through the other*, and that their taking place 'in me' tells us something about *the other (already) in me*" (Bennington 2000, 73–74).

Put differently, obligation refers us to the *munus* at the root of immunity, autoimmunity, and community; obligation, or the *munus*, is a name for the alteration or hetero-affection that autoimmunity relentlessly exposes us to. No immunitary measures, whether of the kind of border controls or ethics, can put an end to it nor make it, once and for all, safe. Moreover, what autoimmunity and obligation alike might draw our attention to is that at the heart of ethical responsibility, and indeed at the heart of political decision and action, is something like a passivity or a vulnerability, both *to* the other and *of* the other. That such an obligation, unlike ethics or the law, does not require the recognition of any authority, (and indeed is all the more powerful for a lack of power) might prompt a reorientation of the construal of power within the schema of (bio)political responsibility. Obligation, that is, permits the consideration of those others (living beings and futures alike) that do not fall within the ambit of current political institutions. As Caputo suggests, the "others" to whom obligation binds us "must be spread out and disseminated, so as to include not only other human beings but what is other than human—animals, e.g., or other living things generally, and even the earth" (Caputo 1993, 5). Others who are not, for example, subjects of the law of the country in which they find themselves, or taxpayers to be represented in government, or rights-bearing individuals at all, still exert obligations *as a kind of power*, which cannot be reduced, on the one hand, to sovereign power, and on the other, to a pure passivity or vulnerability. The responsibility that they engender, then, is likewise

not of the order of passive rule-following nor the pure subjective freedom of an agent, insofar as any response is in the first place a response to a solicitation, the effect of an autoimmune vulnerability to "the other (already) in me" (Bennington 2000, 74). The affirmation of an autoimmunity of collective life, then, insofar as autoimmunity is precisely what institutes the necessity of responsibility to the other, cannot be reduced to either an affirmation of pure passivity or the abdication of political decision and responsibility altogether. Nonetheless, autoimmunity, hospitality, and obligation do not, and cannot produce the kind of normative claim that many hoped would become present in Derrida's later works. Instead, autoimmunity, we could say, names a force that makes "politics" both possible and necessary, both in the sense of everyday ethico-political engagements and the possibility of another politics that remains to be invented. If autoimmunity as a logic of life should make a difference to the political, should be taken to "politically intervene," what must be taken into account is the *particular* significance of autoimmunity among other "nonsynonymous substitutes" in (and for) deconstruction; not because it harbors within it a stronger normative force than those that came before it, but because it speaks directly to a certain nonpower or vulnerability at the heart of life. Taken seriously in the frame of biopolitics, this autoimmunity of life, while not *itself* a (bio)political project, nor the work of a biopolitical thinker narrowly construed, would be, as Vitale indeed suggests, "necessary and full of repercussions" (2018, 234n36) for both biopolitics and deconstruction, insofar as it tells us something potentially surprising about life and power—and accordingly, as I will now go on to demonstrate, insofar as it relates to the protection and reproduction of collective life.

4 The Power of Powerlessness

If we have established that an affirmation of autoimmunity neither contains nor implies a strongly normative demand, it nonetheless remains to be thought whether the nonpower or vulnerability that autoimmunity implies—and the obligations or *munera* to which it thereby exposes us—should have implications for thinking a politics of life. With the generalisation of Derrida's logic of autoimmunity having been shown to be "incapable" of grounding or otherwise guaranteeing a set of normative political principles, that is, that same logic, as the previous chapter has argued, cannot be said to be *extraneous* to a politics of life insofar as it makes political decision and action both possible and unavoidable. Moreover, if the logic of autoimmunity reveals a certain nonpower at the heart of political responsibility, and if this nonpower is reducible neither to sovereign power nor to pure passivity, and finally, if it enables, as Caputo suggests, the consideration of others outside of those institutions (say, the law or the family) that would otherwise circumscribe those to whom we owe a response, what possibilities for (bio)political thought and action might it be seen to open up? To what extent has this possibility—here framed as an effect of autoimmunity—been recognised if not named as such within contemporary biopolitical thought? If the operations of contemporary biopolitics take place through the production, delimitation and securitisation of the sphere of political life, and through the delimitation of whose lives are subject to biopolitical *power*, it may be the case that the nonpower that autoimmunity indicates could offer a challenge not only to contemporary biopolitical practices, prohibitions and prescriptions, but even, perhaps, the biopolitical frame "itself" as it regards the relation of power and life.

Beginning from this thought of autoimmunity as a generalised vulnerability constitutive of collective life, then, what kind of (bio)politics is possible? Even if we have established that such a vulnerability does not necessarily consign us to indecision, the *affirmation* of such a vulnerability might appear to consign us to another kind of hopelessness. That is, if autoimmunity renders any political or ethical decision uncertain and fragile, and if obligation is instituted in one's being seized by or laid claim to by the other, we should have cause to be wary of affirming such a state of precariousness. Affirming such a "nonpower," in other words, could mean little more than acquiescence to the machinations of *actual* political power. Indeed we could suggest that the surest path by which this vulnerability can be translated from a quasi-ontological state to a political one would lead us to affirm precarity as political fact: that we are all precarious, that our lives cannot be made sure or safe, and that any claims to security in life—whether in terms of our bodies and health, our work, our economic position or citizenship—are unfounded, liable to be lost without notice, indeed at the whims of real political and economic power that could at any moment deem our lives unworthy of living. If the central question of biopolitics is how certain lives are deemed politically viable and valuable—and hence also worthy of protection, nurturing, optimisation, "reform," and so on—a "biopolitics" premised on autoimmunity could amount to a universal precaritisation of life, as the inverse of the selective securitisation that immunitary biopolitical dispositifs engender. Given that a constitutive autoimmunity implies, among other things, risk, exposure, dispossession, uncertainty, and even nonsovereignty, it is hard to see how any politics premised on such would be anything other than an expansion of the precarious situation we find ourselves in under global capitalism, one otherwise largely theorised as historically-bounded and differing in degree according to divisions such as class position, citizenship status, or exposure to violence in war (Han 2018, 336).

What constitutes the precise state of precarity, the process of production of states of precarity, and the attribution of precarity to certain populations are differently theorised in multiple fields—philosophy, political theory, and anthropology, among others—by authors such as Judith Butler (2006; 2010; 2012b), Isabell Lorey (2015), Lauren Berlant (2011), and Guy Standing (2011), with differing political and contextual investments, which accordingly lend a broad range of meanings to the word (Puar et al. 2012, 163; Han 2018, 332). Across

this field, however, there is a general consensus that *precarity* is a condition that is *instituted*—but at the same time there is an acknowledgement, sometimes explicit, that *precariousness* is something of an existential problem, inherent to social and bodily life, prior to the institution of precarity as an economic or geopolitical condition (Berlant in Puar et al. 2012, 166; Han 2018, 332). Most notably, and formatively for others working on the subject, in the work of Judith Butler, bodily vulnerability and social exposure are the conditions of possibility for the differential distribution of precariousness that renders some lives more exposed to violence, destruction, and immiseration than others (Butler 2006, 29). However, in clarifying the relationship between these two poles or modes of precariousness, Butler also poses another possibility, one that could be read as a politicisation of the deconstructive (non)ethics of obligation articulated in the previous chapter: that this primary vulnerability can be mobilised to a different end, toward a more egalitarian and inclusive thought of politics that looks to ameliorate this differential distribution of precariousness, for example, to oppose war, or in "concrete social policy regarding such issues as shelter, work, food, medical care, and legal status" (Butler 2010, 13). That is, our primary vulnerability to others, she argues, can form the basis on which claims can be made for the protection of lives otherwise deemed in her terms "ungrievable" and thus unworthy of protection. An egalitarian recognition of such vulnerability would demand concrete resistance to the ways in which life is *made* precarious through what she calls "frames of recognition," the politically-saturated conditions that "decide which lives will be recognizable as lives and which will not" (Butler 2010, 12). Butler's work, therefore, might articulate the effects of the logic of autoimmunity in biopolitics, in her analysis of precariousness as a constitutive vulnerability of life—her exposition of which, I will suggest, accurately describes that engendered by autoimmunity—and further, furnish something of a response to the question of an "autoimmune biopolitics," by proposing to establish this vulnerability as the basis of a politics that takes life as its object.

Across several works, most notably *Precarious Life* (2006) and *Frames of War* (2010), Butler develops a complex argument for a renewed thought of political community that begins from a simple observation: that human life is inherently precarious in that it "requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be sustained as a life" (Butler 2010, 14). This vulnerability, she argues, is one that we "cannot will away without ceasing to

be human" (2006, xiv). She focuses on the role and function of grief: how grief and mourning serve to demonstrate not only which lives have more or less value, but which lives are apprehended as properly living. At the same time, grief is available to be publicly and politically mobilised in ways that cultivate violence and justify the deaths of those not perceived to be properly human and properly living. For Butler, mourning demonstrates what obligation does for Caputo: a certain dispossession of the self in being seized by the other. She writes that, in grieving, "something takes hold of you," but asks:

> Where does it come from? What sense does it make? What claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized? (Butler 2006, 21)

In this sense, mourning another is not something we simply or actively *do*, as though mourning were an expression of autonomy, an outcome of a decision-making process. Rather, mourning is something that we are *subject* to, something that disrupts our activity, precisely by taking hold of us, derailing our thinking and stopping us in our tracks. For this reason, she argues, grief demonstrates

> the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. (Butler 2006, 23)

That is, we *suffer* grief, rather than choose it, and in that suffering we are exposed to our primary exposure to others, which precedes and makes possible any individuation or agency. It is not just that the death of another comes to affect us, but that it reveals a prior imbrication of the "I" with the other that is lost, problematising the possibility of simple self-narration. In this way, Butler's accounting of grief, like Caputo's obligation in *Against Ethics* and Nancy's account of the effects of transplantation in "L'Intrus," registers not some kind of absolute dispossession or dispersal of the self in others—as if such a thing were possible—but the extent to which autonomy is contingent on a certain "mode of dispossession" (2006, 28).

But beyond this observation, Butler asks, "can this insight lead to a normative orientation for politics?" (2006, 23). She argues that the dispossession and contingency revealed in mourning permit the apprehension of a certain quasi-ontological precariousness at work in living, precisely that vulnerability that "we cannot will away without ceasing to be human" (Butler 2006, xiv). Violence, she argues, is another way in which this vulnerability is exposed. Hence it is not that such precariousness of life is equally distributed, but rather, "this vulnerability becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions, especially those in which violence is a way of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited" (Butler 2006, 29). That is, it is on the basis of a more primary vulnerability or exposure that political precarity, exploitation, and abandonment are possible, but such forms of precariousness are not therefore reducible to an ontological, bodily inevitability. Beyond unequal distribution, too, such precariousness, even while it is established as a "common human vulnerability" (2006, 30) cannot rightly be called a "human condition that is universally shared" (2006, 20) in the sense of a positive attribute of the human that would precede any exposure to social and political forces. Indeed, Butler argues that

> if we are to make broader social and political claims about rights of protection and entitlements to persistence and flourishing, we will first have to be supported by a new bodily ontology, one that implies the rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependency, exposure, bodily persistence, desire, work and the claims of language and social belonging. (Butler 2010, 2)

That is, for Butler, it is necessary to think the body as "exposed to socially and politically articulated forces as well as to claims of sociality… that make possible the body's persisting and flourishing" (Butler 2010, 3). Precariousness and vulnerability are not a property of living beings, but the "condition of being conditioned" (2010, 23); as Fiona Jenkins explains, "this can be posited as a generalized condition and, indeed, as the very mode of equality, precisely because it is not 'proper' to one individual or another" (Jenkins 2013, 111).

Butler is careful, still, to distinguish this vulnerability from something added on to life: it cannot be understood, she writes, "as a deprivation… unless we understand the need that is thwarted" (Butler 2006, 31). She takes, as a primary example, the case of a newborn for whom "the necessary support" is unavailable; in this case, "this primary scene is one of

abandonment or violence or starvation, and theirs are bodies given over to nothing, or to brutality, or to no sustenance" (2006, 31). She follows this thought further in *Frames of War*, writing that "it is not that we are born and then later become precarious, but rather that precariousness is coextensive with birth itself (birth is, by definition, precarious), which means that it matters whether or not this infant being survives, and that its survival is dependent on what we might call a social network of hands" (2010, 14). Precariousness does not come *after* the fact—rather, the fact of birth consists in being given over to others, dependent on others for survival. Moreover, she argues, the possibility of receiving such care is installed in advance by grievability. Following the figure of the newborn, she writes:

> Grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters. For the most part, we imagine that an infant comes into the world, is sustained in and by that world through to adulthood and old age, and finally dies. We imagine that when the child is wanted, there is celebration at the beginning of life. But there can be no celebration without an implicit understanding that the life is grievable, that it would be grieved if it were lost, and that this future anterior is installed as the condition of its life… The apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of precarious life. Grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living, exposed to non-life from the start. (Butler 2010, 15)

For Butler, grieving as a necessary possibility installs an obligation to others, on which we depend for survival. The necessary exposure of life to death, and of the living being to its other—with all its attendant dangers, such as violence—is the condition of possibility for any life, since it is this exposure that makes it possible for others to recognise us "as living."

In this way, Butler's argument for a politics premised on this common human vulnerability exemplified by birth appears as a politicised articulation of Caputo's account of obligation, and of the ethical posture of deconstruction. While claims have been made that Butler's recent works constitute an "ethical turn" (Benhabib 2013) and, in some instances, therefore also a "turn *away* from politics," as Moya Lloyd suggests, these works "emphasise how *power* operates to… shape and condition the scene of recognition, and to circumscribe the types of ethical encounter that might take place there" (Lloyd 2015, 167; emphasis

mine). Butler argues, that is, that contending with both this common human precariousness—her "new bodily ontology"—and the unequal distribution of precariousness as shaped by power can lead us to a normative orientation for politics. The conditions for obligation are, for Butler, shaped in advance by political forces, circumstances that make the recognition of the other as human possible. But apprehending a common human vulnerability, she claims, obliges us to oppose "the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others" (Butler 2006, 30). That is, this apprehension institutes an ethical demand, but one that is "bound up with biopolitics"—for Butler, "those powers that organize life… the powers that differentially dispose lives to precarity… and that establish a set of measures for the differential valuation of life itself" (Butler 2012a, 10). Moreover, she argues, in concrete terms, the claim that a living being's death would matter is what makes it possible to make claims to protection, nourishment, or better conditions for living. "Normatively construed," she writes, "there ought to be a more inclusive and egalitarian way of recognizing precariousness, and… this [egalitarian recognition] should take form as concrete social policy regarding such issues as shelter, work, food, medical care, and legal status" (Butler 2010, 13). The task, then, begins with the apprehension of precariousness in those for whom such recognition has been denied—which is to say, with grieving ungrievable life.

As several authors, such as Cary Wolfe (2013), Fiona Jenkins (2009), Catherine Mills (2005; 2011), and Penelope Deutscher (2017) have noted, and indeed as Butler herself acknowledges in *Frames of War*, this discourse on "life," the association of life with precariousness, and the argument for protections on the basis of the apprehension of the precariousness of other living beings otherwise understood as "less than human," risks—or promises—the extension of this expanded community of persons beyond the limits of what we would consider, perhaps, "humans by default." Wolfe argues that "Butler's effort… runs aground on the question of nonhuman animals," asking,

> why should the dangers and vulnerabilities, the exposure to violence and harm that accrue from the fact of embodiment be limited to a "common *human* vulnerability?" Why shouldn't *non-human* lives count as "grievable lives," particularly since many millions of people grieve very deeply for their lost animal companions? (Wolfe 2013, 18)

While Wolfe aims to indicate a possibility for the consideration of nonhuman animals as ethical and political subjects, in doing so, he highlights a problem not reducible to the treatment of nonhuman animals, and one that could jeopardise the political outcomes of Butler's attempts to expand the "human" on the basis of grievability. Wolfe is sympathetic to Butler's argument that the norm of the human works to produce "a 'Western' idea of the 'man' over and against populations considered 'dubiously human' " (Wolfe 2013, 21). The problem, then, for Wolfe, is not merely the fact that certain, if not all, animal lives could be understood as similarly precarious and indeed part of an interdependent social ontology, but that the apparently necessary exclusion of animals risks reproducing the same logic of constitutive exclusion (Wolfe 2013, 21). If biopolitical logic consists in "circumscribing what form(s) of life will be politically viable and visible and what forms will not" (Elmore 2018, 83), then, as Wolfe argues, the exclusion of certain (human) lives "by means of the discursive mechanism of 'animalization' will be readily available for deployment against *whatever* body happens to fall outside the ethnocentric *we*" (Wolfe 2013, 21). For Wolfe, the distinction between the human and the animal is a "discursive resource, not a zoological designation" (Wolfe 2013, 10). In that sense, redrawing the line elsewhere, as egalitarian as the attempt may be, retains the distinction between (human) lives that "matter" and (animal) lives that remain killable and so, despite Butler's intent, always permits the figuration of certain (human) lives as animal and thus killable by virtue of not fully living. Indeed, as Wolfe argues, "to live under biopolitics is to live in a situation in which we are all always already (potential) 'animals' before the law—not just nonhuman animals according to zoological classification, but any group of living beings that is so framed" (Wolfe 2013, 10). Hence even while Wolfe's broader argument is for a deeper consideration of nonhuman animals as ethical and political subjects, what he draws attention to is that Butler's insistence on the "human" risks keeping intact the same mechanisms that serve to exclude certain human lives from ethical and political standing.

Butler, for her part, acknowledges the potential for the extension of grievability beyond the limits of the human, even as far as noting that precariousness ought to be recognised as "a condition that links human and non-human lives" (2010, 13). This statement immediately follows her elaboration of her project in material terms, that "there

ought to be a more inclusive and egalitarian way of recognizing precariousness, and that this should take form as concrete social policy" (2010, 13), hinting at the possibility of normative political claims for the protection of nonhuman lives. Nonetheless, she returns to the "human" as her subject, she argues, precisely in order to "create it anew, to give it, through performative force, a life where it has not had one before" (in Kirby 2006, 153). Butler thus acknowledges the possibility that, given that her project looks to expand "the human" to include those exiled from the status of humanity by refiguring "human life" as precisely what is recognised in the apprehension of precariousness, such a definition could easily be understood to apply equally to precarious nonhuman lives. Yet she continues to argue that the "human" must remain a point of focus, and "be mobilized for the purposes of sheltering precarious life," even while "that 'life' takes us beyond the purview of the human to a broader problem of the vulnerability and exposure of sentient beings" (in Kirby 2006, 153–54). The fact that Butler acknowledges such a possibility, then, raises the crucial question of *why* nonhuman lives—and perhaps especially those that, whether in terms of precariousness and grievability, sociality, or interdependence with human life, might meet Butler's standards, like companion and service animals and great apes—do not, in Butler's view, likewise impress on us such claims to protection, or indeed why the "human" must be redeployed in the service of life at all. Wolfe suggests that "the reasons for this lacuna in Butler's work are complex," but that:

> The main problems seem to be 1) that Butler's concept of ethics and of community remains tied to a reciprocity model based on a "mutual striving for recognition," and 2) that her notion of subjectivity—and this is a directly related point—remains too committed to the primacy of "agency" for ethical standing. (Wolfe 2013, 19–20)

The question of whether nonhuman animals can express "agency" or "strive for recognition" aside, the figures that appear in Butler's work as the (potential) subjects of the politics to which it aspires, as Wolfe points out, are those whose existence could be construed as—or reduced to—a state of total powerlessness (Wolfe 2013, 20). That is, Butler argues that "community itself requires the recognition that we are all, in different ways, striving for recognition" (2006, 44); and yet her subjects are precisely those who are *not* seen or heard to be "striving for recognition"—whether they in fact are or not—or even seen or heard at all.

Butler's argument, that is, often foregrounds those whose needs and desires go unrepresented and thus *unrecognised* in the mediated ways that we come to understand war, terror, and state violence, and therefore those who *should* be heard to call out for such recognition. But Butler's most exemplary cases—indeed the figures that mark the two central terms of qualification for "mattering," precariousness and grievability—are precisely those incapable of such "mutual recognition": the infant and the dead. Such figures depict those whose existence could be construed as pure incapacitation, one only *subject* to the actions of others and in no position to respond *at all*, let alone adequately. Indeed, as Wolfe writes, "her examples… have to do (to use the language of analytic philosophy) not with moral *agents* (those whose *behaviour* is subject to moral evaluation) but with *patients* (those whose treatment is)" (Wolfe 2013, 20).

Indeed, Butler's neo-Levinasian understanding of the ethical relation is premised on such an unequal relation, from "our" apprehension of the other's incapacitation or vulnerability. It is precisely this fact that leaves it open to questions such as Wolfe's, on whether animals might likewise appear as ethical and political subjects, or indeed as "persons," within such a framework. But perhaps more dangerously, at least from Butler's point of view, is the possibility that another kind of life, in its exclusion and even abjection from the realm of "human life," in its spectacular vulnerability to the law and to apparent violence, and perhaps above all in its state of complete bodily dependency for survival, might come to be seen as an example, if not *the* example, of precarious life: the human foetus. An attempt to "reclaim life," as Butler has it, and to produce a political discourse aimed at fostering life on the basis of bodily interdependency and exposure to potential violence could risk appearing not only applicable to foetal life, but could perhaps even find in foetal life its apotheosis. Fiona Jenkins asks, where abortion is legally established, "would not the exposure to violence of foetal life provide an example of where these exclusions operate in an especially telling way?" (Jenkins 2009, 65). The question is troubling enough that Butler has responded more than once, both in a dedicated portion of the introduction to *Frames of War* and,

briefly, in an interview conducted shortly after the book's publication with Nina Power (Butler and Power 2009).[4] In *Frames of War*, she writes,

> It is difficult for those on the Left to think about a discourse of "life," since we are used to thinking of those who favor increased reproductive freedoms as "pro-choice" and those who oppose them as "pro-life." But perhaps there is a way to retrieve thinking about "life" for the left, and to make use of this framework of precarious life to sustain a strong feminist position on reproductive freedoms. One could easily see how those who take on so-called "pro-life" positions might seize upon such a view that the fetus is precisely this life that remains ungrieved and should be grievable, or that it is a life that is not recognized as life according to those who favor the right to abortion. Indeed, this argument could be closely linked to animal-rights claims, since one might well argue that the animal is a life that is generally not regarded as a life according to anthropocentric norms. (Butler 2010, 15–16)

Indeed, she argues that the recognition that the foetus, the animal, and the "person" "are all organisms that are living in some sense or another" does not necessarily enjoin us to do anything in particular (Butler 2010, 16). The apprehension of something called "life," in and of itself, does not and indeed *cannot* institute a universal demand for protection; both animal and human life depend on the consumption of other living organisms—plants and microbes are living things, after all—and in a broad sense "it can be argued that processes of life themselves require destruction and degeneration" (Butler 2010, 16). Likewise, the fact that the foetus is undeniably human tissue does not also entail such claims to protection, as Butler notes (2010, 18). It is here that she distances her work from a discourse on biopolitics, writing:

> To determine the ontological specificity of life in such instances would lead us more generally into a discussion of biopolitics, concerning ways of apprehending, controlling, and administering life, and how these modes of power enter into the very definition of life itself… My own contribution, however, is not to the genealogy of the concepts of life or death, but to thinking about precariousness as something

[4] The question and response do not appear in the shorter version of the interview originally published in the *New Statesman* (available at https://www.newstatesman.com/2009/08/media-death-frames-war-obama). The version cited here is an archived copy of the unedited interview as shared on Power's blog.

> both presupposed and managed by such discourse, while never being fully resolved by any discourse. (Butler 2010, 18)

Yet as Penelope Deutscher argues, despite the rarity of explicit reference to biopolitics, "Butler's work engages a Foucauldian conceptualization of biopolitics more than may appear" (Deutscher 2017, 148). Insofar as Butler's work is concerned with "the framing of human life by virtue of (included) exclusions of differential value and intelligibility" (Deutscher 2017, 150), the exclusion of the foetus from the status of human life appears as an undeniably biopolitical decision *on* life, one that would see some status—biological, ontological, social or bodily—attributable to the human that cannot likewise be attributed to the foetus. If this is indeed the case, we should question whether all "default humans" cannot therefore be denied this status on the same basis; that is, to ask whether such a logic of constitutive exclusion, like Wolfe's "animalisation," could be deployed in the same manner.

Of course, the risks of considering foetal life within a biopolitical framework, and especially in Butler's framework of grievability, should also be taken seriously, as should Butler's argument for foetal life's exclusion. Butler argues that her task is precisely *not* one of determining the specificity of "life" by insisting on ontological differences between the life of the "human" and those of the foetus, embryo, or animal. Indeed, she argues in *Precarious Life* that her project is not "a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology" (Butler 2006, 33); not to make of precariousness an ontological status for the "human," therefore, by which we could recognise humans otherwise ascribed a status of "less than human." This insurrection, she writes, consists in the "critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade?" (Butler 2006, 33), questions that look to unsettle, rather than uphold, whatever distinction happens to be used to separate the lives of real, properly living, human persons from lives that are not real. But it is for precisely this reason that it is all the more surprising that Butler also insists that

> the Left has to "reclaim" the discourse of life, especially if we hope to come up with significant analyses of biopolitics, and we are to be able to clarify under what conditions the loss of life is unjustifiable. [This] means arguing against those who

> oppose abortion and making clear in what sense the "life" we defend against war is not the same as the "life" of the foetus. (Butler and Power 2009, n.p.)

Butler's argument regarding precarious life, while not fully satisfying, provides some indication of how this appropriation of the discourse of life might proceed without reproducing the kind of claim about the "human" that she warns against—one that would entail normative criteria to be met in order to be properly living and properly grievable, that is, properly *human*. Butler makes clear how she sees the framework of precarious life as having the potential to uphold, rather than restrict, reproductive freedoms: opposing reproductive freedoms, she argues, "intensifies the differential between the grievable and the ungrievable," by "attributing an embryonic life with the right to life while decimating the legitimate claims that women make to their own lives… once again, women become the ungrievable" (Butler 2020, 57). As Penelope Deutscher explains, "because an important aspect of precariousness on which Butler focuses is the capacity of power, governmentality, and epistemological framing for *dehumanization*, the fetus is a less than ideal example [of grievable life]" (Deutscher 2017, 155). That is, she suggests, "the fetus is not established with sufficient social subjectivation to be vulnerable to a significant *unmaking* or *de*subjectivation, the annulment or deconstitution of its historical or plausible subjectivation" (Deutscher 2017, 155–56). Insofar as someone pregnant is *strongly* human—not on the basis of some biological or ontological attribute but on the basis of having *already having been made human*—asserting a right to life for the foetus she carries would amount to her deconstitution, potentially figuring her life as less grievable and less worthy of protection than that of the foetus. Indeed this occurs even where no right to life is established or even argued for, as Monica Casper documents in her studies of foetal surgery, for example: where the foetus takes the position of a (surgical, and thus moral) patient, the gestating body vacillates, sometimes belonging to a patient and therefore appearing as the object of care, sometimes as "Mom," yet other times as a mere obstacle in the way of the treatment of the *primary* patient, or indeed as a biomedical tool deployed to that end—"the best heart-lung machine available" (Casper 1994a, 312). When circumstances call for the treatment of the foetus *as* a person, the otherwise given human status of the pregnant patient gets put into question—and by extension, so does the status of women in general as presumed potential childbearers, who risk being stripped of the right to articulate claims to their own lives, to

their bodies, and to their care. The danger in recognising the grievability of foetal life, for Butler, does not lie with the foetus *per se*, but with who that recognition can render ungrievable in exchange.

Foetal life is therefore troubling for Butler because to recognise it as grievable, precarious, and vulnerable would instil in us an ethical obligation towards that life that, if taken up and acted upon, would risk the forgetting or deliberate ignorance of our obligations to the life of others, deconstituting them as ethical subjects and indeed even as human beings. This possibility is most obviously a danger in cases of overt gestational conflict, but is not reducible to such cases, as Casper's accounts of the construction and deconstitution of personhood in foetal surgery show (Casper 1994a, 1994b). Butler's fear that her argument—without such caveats against the inclusion of foetal life—could be adopted by those who would favour a pro-life perspective is hardly unfounded; as Lauren Berlant has argued, the discourses of civil rights and feminism have already been taken up to the same ends (1997, 97). Moreover, any proposal to protect against the unmaking or deconstitution of those who would, framed differently, be recognised as human and grievable—through the loss of rights, identity papers, citizenship, a voice—*always* risks extension to foetal life, insofar as it *is*—regardless of whether it should be—variably recognised as grievable, properly living, and even, following Berlant, a citizen deprived of its rights:

> By merging the American counterdiscourse of minority rights with the revitalized providential nationalist rhetoric of the Reaganite right, the pro-life movement has composed a magical and horrifying spectacle of amazing vulnerability: the unprotected person, the citizen without a country or a future, the fetus unjustly imprisoned in its mother's hostile gulag. (Berlant 1997, 97).

That is, there may always be circumstances in which the framing of foetal life lends it a *more strongly human* status than others, and indeed if Berlant's broader argument is to be believed, women are already constituted, socially if not legally, as secondary in relation to the foetus (Berlant 1997). The necessity, then, of avoiding such a possibility, is what makes the foetus an exception—one that, as Butler notes, cannot be established in the form of a rule, but retains as always a normalising potential: lives that are already established, socially or institutionally, as grievable lives must be protected against their unmaking, and specifically

protected against the ways in which they may be unmade by the recognition of other forms of life. The danger of this thought, of course, is exactly what Butler warns us against in *Frames of War*: that claims to recognition and protection for lives *not yet* seen as worth protecting can always be reconstituted as a threat to other—already recognised as human—lives, for whom the minimisation of their own precarity is all too often understood as contingent on the maximisation of precarity for others (Butler 2010, 2–3, 22, 42).

To the extent that Butler's discourse on precarity constitutes a normative biopolitical claim that begins with the generalised vulnerability of collective life, then, it necessarily retains a biopolitical power *over* life, a power that remains attributed to the "human," even if what constitutes the "human" is indeed denaturalised and acknowledged as an effect of shifting frames of intelligibility. This power consists in producing—by way of necessity—a zone of constitutive exclusion by which some forms of life must be kept from entering into the "community" (of human life) understood as the social bond instituted by the mutual obligation to guard life against violence and deprivation. What appears, at first, as a politics premised on an affirmation of (autoimmune) vulnerability, now risks reinstating a thanatopolitical principle of immunitary protection, both in the normative claim to preserve precarious lives as lives, and in the apparent necessity of protecting those—equal, human—precarious lives from the intrusive claims of others. On the one hand, this could be construed as a problem wrought by having begun from vulnerability and grief, which, as Bonnie Honig argues, cannot but produce a "limited and limiting politics": "if grievability, and the precariousness it postulates, secure equality, they do not only secure equality. They position us also in a sentimental ontology of fragility, not resilience" (Honig 2013, 30–31). Such a sentimental ontology—with its emphasis on fragility, hence deconstitution, unmaking—limits, as Honig puts it, our ability to "engage anew with the complexities of political life lived in connection with others" (2013, 30) and therefore our ability to imagine a politics beyond the terms of immunitary protection against harm. In its place, then, Honig argues for an agonistic humanism that draws "not only nor even primarily on mortality or suffering," but on, among other things, "natality and pleasure, [and] power (not just powerlessness)" (Honig 2013, 19). On the other hand, however, given that in Butler's work, vulnerability is not *consistently* reducible to suffering, deprivation, and powerlessness, but indeed presents itself, at times, as the condition of possibility for action, obligation, and even natality,

pleasure, and power "itself," perhaps the problem should be construed differently. That is, perhaps the limitations of the framework of precarious life should be understood not as deriving from vulnerability *as such*, but rather, on the *use* of vulnerability—like "life," as Butler suggests—"as if we know what it means, what it requires, what it demands" (Butler 2001, 27). That is, what comes to limit the frame of precarious life is the reduction of the *effects* of the recognition of vulnerability to "securing equality," and of the *demands* of vulnerability—hence the *response* that its recognition calls for—to immunitary protection. Indeed, this is precisely where Butler struggles to differentiate her thought from one that would be appropriable into a discourse of a "right to life," with the result that the foetus must be made an exception to the order that would take vulnerability, grievability, and corporeal dependency as securing an equal right to protection.

To put it differently: the locus of Butler's intervention is the question of whose lives do and do not "count," biopolitically speaking, and the question of our responsibility to those who *do* is already settled in advance. But what if Butler's identification of precariousness as shared among the living—not only among human beings, but non-human animals, and even plants, embryos and foetuses, "living cells" and so on—and her conclusion from this generality that "not everything included under the rubric of 'precarious life' is thus, *a priori*, worthy of protection from destruction" (2010, 18) offers us, by contrast, something other than merely the desire to (re)install certain norms in order to distinguish between which kinds of life must be defended? That is, far from giving all forms of life equal value, the framework of precarious life might instead highlight the necessity and urgency of considering the obligations that emerge from vulnerability in their singularity, and of remaining on guard against prescriptions that might reproduce the same dangers that they attempt to guard against. Indeed, following the argument produced in the previous chapter, this is the very problem with such normative prescriptions: by determining a rule-governed and predictable *response*, they rule out the chance of *responsibility*, which consists, precisely, in deciding the undecidable. In attempting to produce a politics that contends with precarious life, Butler ultimately seeks to make (that) life *safe*—literally, and in more ways than one. Butler looks to assume the injunction to "safeguard life" (Butler 2020, 71), but this demand for safety reduces the question of responding to vulnerability to a politics of immunitary protection. At the same time, this limitation—the certainty of our responsibility to the

other—means that following this injunction can always produce injustices—say, by insisting on an equal right to life for embryos or *e. coli*. Hence the second sense of "making safe"—that is, to make *politics* safe by inscribing within the "rule" the necessary exceptions to whom (or to what) the rule does not apply, thus shoring up the "life" to be protected against intrusive others. But the risk attached to this "making safe"—just as ethics attempts to make obligation safe—is that of foreclosing responsibility altogether, and thereby potentially failing to measure up to the singularity of our responsibility to the other, or, alternatively, failing to consider the ways in which responding with such certainty can produce or exacerbate the suffering or violence that it attempts to protect against. But that Butler's framework meets its limit in the face of this question of "making safe" might, however, demand a renewed attention to vulnerability not only as a generalisable feature of corporeal and social life, but also as a chance to "reimagine the possibility of community" (Butler 2006, 20). That is, it should also warrant attention in the sense of *vigilance* toward the association of vulnerability with only immunitary protection, and toward the effects of this framing on possibilities of political community that remain to be thought, as Butler herself suggests is necessary, beyond "what has been realized or what is currently conceived as realizable" (Butler 2009, 305).

In other words, insofar as Butler's account does not, after all, limit itself to a reading of vulnerability as mere fragility, but instead reconstrues it as the very chance of life, the reduction of what vulnerability therefore requires and demands to the provision of immunitary protection might also reveal what Robert Briggs identifies as "a *ruse* of power," "the *lure* or the *allure*, that is, of the language of 'vulnerability' " (Briggs 2019, 32). Briggs is writing on the influence of a certain ethical reading of Derrida's "concept" of nonpower as vulnerability, a reading derived from Derrida's reflections on animals in which Derrida claims that the "*first* and *decisive* question" regarding animals is "whether animals *can suffer*" (Derrida 2008, 27). This question, which Derrida inherits from Jeremy Bentham, appears to shift the criteria by which animals' potential ethical standing has historically been judged, from questions of the *logos*—"whether the animal can think, reason, or speak, etc." (Derrida 2008, 27)—to the question of vulnerability. According to Derrida, Bentham's question therefore "changes everything," in that it does not ask whether animals possess a particular *ability* or power but instead "is disturbed by a certain *passivity*," "a not-being-able" (Derrida 2008, 27). Derrida continues:

> "Can they suffer?" amounts to asking "Can they *not be able*?" And what of this inability [*impouvoir*]? What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability? What is this nonpower at the heart of power? What is its quality or modality? How should one take it into account? What right should be accorded to it? (Derrida 2008, 27–28)

In Dawne McCance's reading, the question " 'changes everything' *for ethics*" (2018, 120; emphasis mine). That is, by making the question of suffering the "first and decisive" one regarding animals, McCance reads in Derrida a call away from a view of ethics as the responsible actions of a "rational speaking subject" and instead towards an ethics of compassion in which a (presumably human) addressee is "called by animals to respond" (McCance 2018, 120). Similarly, Stephen Thierman contends that Derrida's identification of vulnerability as a kind of nonpower "opens a space for an ethical recognition of nonhuman others," offering the possibility of an "expanded ethical consciousness" (Thierman 2011, 185–86). Following this thought, Thierman produces an account of corporeal dependency and vulnerability that leads him to claims for a wider moral community, developing an argument that is not far from Butler's, but which sees in this shared vulnerability the basis for the inclusion of nonhuman animals (Thierman 2011). What Derrida's borrowed question offers for critical animal studies and animal advocacy alike, then, is a chance to consider the ethical standing of living beings on a radically different basis to that historically emphasised in arguments for animal rights, that is, not on the basis of certain capacities but instead on an "inability [*impouvoir*]," that is, a "nonpower" identified with vulnerability (Derrida 2008, 27). These ethical readings thus retrieve in Derrida's later works on "the animal question" the possibility of a kind of universal consideration of the living and even of sustaining environments that is supported by earlier commentaries on the possibility of a deconstructive "ethics"—including Caputo's *Against Ethics*, as noted in the previous chapter, in which Caputo argues that the "others" to whom we are bound by obligation "must be spread out and disseminated, so as to include not only other human beings but what is other than human—animals, e.g., or other living things generally, and even the earth" (Caputo 1993, 5; see also Briggs 2001). Cary Wolfe, similarly, suggests that for Derrida "our shared vulnerability and finitude as embodied beings forms the foundation of our compassion and impulse toward justice for animals" (Wolfe 2013, 17),

arguing that the significance of Derrida's treatment of animals lies with his "direct address… [to] nonhuman animals as potential subjects of justice" (Wolfe 2013, 102–3). But Wolfe makes the additional move of situating Derrida's contribution in not just an ethical but a biopolitical frame, drawing out from this ethical reading a sense of biopolitical justice to which the necessarily anthropocentric model of "animal rights" is inadequate precisely for the way it permits, in principle, the sacrifice of (certain) animal victims, as his engagement with Butler also makes clear. In this way, Wolfe, like others, argues for a "newly expanded community of the living," but emphasises that the "biopolitical point" involves "the concern we should all have with where violence and immunitary protection fall within it, because we are all, after all, potentially animals before the law" (Wolfe 2013, 105)—to some extent echoing Butler's call for "a politics that seeks to diminish suffering universally, that seeks to recognize the sanctity of life, of all lives" (Butler 2006, 104), but insisting that this call should be expanded "across species lines" (Wolfe 2013, 21).

As Briggs argues, however, Derrida's subsequent questioning of this "nonpower," and indeed its appearance in many earlier texts (in which "there is not an animal or vulnerable body in sight" (2019, 27)), make clear that "nonpower," even as identified with vulnerability, is not reducible to a kind of pure victimhood or exposure to suffering (Briggs 2019, 32). Rather, Briggs argues that Derrida's "nonpower" or "vulnerability," understood as susceptibility or receptiveness, stands instead (or in addition) as "the very condition of action, response, invention… the condition for being able to do or affect anything at all" (Briggs 2019, 32). Derrida's "nonpower" stands, that is, as another nonsynonymous substitute for autoimmunity—or vice versa—as a *constitutive* vulnerability that is, at the same time, the very chance of life. Yet those ethical readings that associate Derrida's "nonpower" with vulnerability, including Wolfe's *Before the Law*, Briggs suggests, always seem to couch the end of politics in terms of the question of immunitary protection (or "making safe"). And it is in this move that he identifies the potential operation of the *power* of the language of vulnerability, a "ruse" of the *language* of power which

> exerts or enacts... a double reduction, *confining* (by defining) the significance of "nonpower" or "passivity" to a given organism's condition of vulnerability, potentially reducing the latter in turn to pure incapacitation, a state of absolute

> jeopardy: a self-same body whose autonomy remains ceaselessly exposed to what is nevertheless characterised as the *gratuitous* operation of violence. (Briggs 2021, 75–76)

In this regard, it must be acknowledged that readings like Wolfe's and Butler's *also* find in vulnerability the potential for response and even invention. As Butler argues, for instance, "vulnerability cannot be associated exclusively with injurability. All responsiveness to what happens is a function and effect of vulnerability" (Butler 2012a, 16). Likewise, Vinciane Despret argues that for Wolfe vulnerability "is not a simple identification of fragility" but the condition for our responsibility to the other (Despret 2016, 87). So the problem here, Briggs argues, is that in the context of these complications to the concepts of "suffering" and "passivity" "the language of vulnerability nevertheless reasserts itself," testifying further "to that language's seductiveness, to its exceedingly attractive force… testif[ying], that is, to the enthralling power of a certain discourse of power 'itself' " (Briggs 2019, 32). The fact that these accounts, despite the complexity with which they treat "vulnerability," fall back on a conception of biopolitical justice in terms of the preservation of life and the protection of the vulnerable, might therefore speak, as Briggs suggests, to "the force of the biopolitical frame itself… to the delimiting effects, that is, of that frame's focus on the question of violence and immunitary protection, hence its presumption that, in the last instance, the only power that counts, (bio)politically speaking, is power 'over' life" (Briggs 2019, 36). What the biopolitical frame *does*, in other words, is limit our capacity to think the effects of power on life only in terms of life's *de*constitution—whether in terms of reduction to bare life or exposure to violence and destruction.

Given this insight, then, the fact that Butler's argument attempts to sidestep its potential biopolitical reading and nonetheless appears to be delimited by a notion of sovereign power over life might speak to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of avoiding the force of the biopolitical frame. That Butler's work takes aim at the violence of state power over life should not, then, be taken as a failure to account for the force of vulnerability. To the contrary, it is in Butler's accounts of state violence—for example, in her discussion of the mobilisation of grief and mourning as a weapon of the state—that she is most attentive to the potential inversions and mutations of the (non)power of vulnerability. But it is easy to get

the sense that for Butler this is always a *misapplication* of vulnerability, either its appropriation by the (distinct and sovereign) power of the state or else a phantasmatic projection that renders the state's violence that of the other (see e.g. Butler 2006, 33–34; 2020, 79–81), rather than a necessary, though contingent, possibility inhabiting the very *concept* of vulnerability. But the insights of *Precarious Life*—before Butler comes to defend human lives against the claims for the apprehension of animal and foetal life as similarly precarious—indicate the possibility of letting loose this other conception of vulnerability, indeed of apprehending its ambivalence as, on the one hand, the position of subjectivation to biopower as sovereign power, and, on the other, as what *animates* and makes possible such sovereign power, which thenceforth must be thought as but one form of power among others. In attending, then, to vulnerability as nonpower, the task is not one of rejecting the analysis of the violence that state power exerts over life, but of extending the analysis of vulnerability as an animating potential.

If the biopolitical frame serves to delimit the conceivable effects of power, then, whatever attending to the (non)power implied in autoimmune vulnerability might offer might never measure up to, or even hope to inform, a "biopolitics" properly speaking, affirmative or otherwise. However, pursuing this thought of vulnerability might permit a reconsideration of what its recognition calls for, if not immunitary protection. What this conception of autoimmune vulnerability as nonpower might permit, that is, is the possibility of contending with the difficulty posed by the fact that precariousness indeed institutes something of a social bond, a tenuous "we" of community, and yet that this precariousness cannot be taken to supply a normative injunction to protect the sanctity of life "as such." To that extent, this thought of autoimmune vulnerability provides a perspective with which to grapple with the *risk* encountered in any encounter with the other: that we do not know, in advance, what the other will have been or whether it will turn out to have harmed us. In this way, too, this perspective might permit a turn to the figures that lurk at the margins of Butler's work—living things like animals and foetuses, whose precariousness, exposure, and dependency make a claim on us but which therefore trouble the association of vulnerability with immunitary protection. Attending to such figures might even turn out to extend the work that Butler sets out to do—unsettling the norm of the human and the ways that it constrains the scope of our obligations to others. Put differently, if vulnerability is thought

not as mere incapacitation, but as the condition of the arrival or *in-ven*tion of the other, it can also be thought as a (non)power animating the continual reinvention of the life that "counts," biopolitically (and ethically) speaking. Contending with the effects of autoimmune vulnerability, that is, might call for a reframing of the terms of political community, and indeed even of biopolitics itself. As I will suggest in the next chapter by following the work of Roberto Esposito, it may be possible to find, even lurking within the history of biopolitics, some alternative to figuring the mode of survival of collective life as immunitary protection.

5 Affirmative Biopolitics?

It would be remiss to claim that no attempts have been made to think the possibility of a biopolitics outside of the immunitary protection of life. Any such claim would have to contend with the work of Roberto Esposito, who, across the trilogy of works *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (2010a), *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (2011), and *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (2008), develops a philosophy of life that looks to counter the immunitary logic that he identifies at the heart of biopolitics. Indeed, where Francesco Vitale suggests the necessity of an encounter—characterised as debate—between biopolitics and biodeconstruction, Esposito is the sole thinker of biopolitics invoked, his work standing as the horizon of that encounter to come (Vitale 2018, 232n36, 32). Esposito argues that within modern biopolitics there exists a central paradox, evidenced by, among other things, nuclear powers of war and twentieth-century totalitarianism: that "biopolitics continually threaten[s] to be reversed into thanatopolitics," turning the immunitary protection of life into the production of death (Esposito 2008, 39). The protection of life in the face of risk, he argues, is the primary mechanism of biopolitics, and one that continually produces death in the name of life. Along with this paradox, he claims that there also exists in theorisations of biopolitics, beginning with Foucault, an "interval of meaning" or "semantic void" between, on the one hand, biopower and sovereignty, and, on the other, biology and politics (Esposito 2008, 39, 45). For Esposito, Foucault's putative ambivalence regarding the apparently thanatopolitical features of biopolitics as they appear in phenomena such as Nazism "prevents us from interpreting the association of sovereignty and biopolitics… in the sense of [either] contemporaneity or succession" (Esposito 2008, 40):

> If we consider the Nazi state, we can say indifferently, as Foucault himself does, that it was the old sovereign power that adopts biological racism for itself, a racism born in opposition to it. Or, on the contrary, that it is the new biopolitical power that made use of the sovereign right of death in order to give life to state racism. If we have recourse to the first interpretive model, biopolitics becomes an internal articulation of sovereignty; if we privilege the second, sovereignty is reduced to a formal schema of biopolitics… Foucault never opts decisively for one or the other. (Esposito 2008, 41)

What is needed to fill this "interval of meaning," on Esposito's account, is "the paradigm of 'immunization,' " which will link together biopolitical forces of protecting life and sovereign forces of producing death, and, more generally, life and politics, such that the concepts no longer appear contradictory but instead "as the two constituent elements of a single, indivisible whole" (Esposito 2008, 45). The logic of immunisation, Esposito argues, reaches its paroxysmal form in the Nazi state, but did not end there: rather, the philosophy of life that motivated such mass production of death has, he argues, been "generalized to the entire world" in a variety of forms, and the struggle for life's protection and negation remains "global politics' only horizon of sense" (Esposito 2008, 147). That is, for Esposito, like Agamben, the thanatopolitical features of Nazism are not to be taken as "historical fact and an anomaly belonging to the past… but in some way as the hidden matrix" of contemporary biopolitics (Agamben 1998, 166). But that Nazism represents the culmination of this logic in the complete reversal of biopolitics into thanatopolitics, he suggests, makes Nazism therefore also the "occasion for an epochal rethinking" of the category of immunisation (Esposito 2008, 10). More than a mere critique of biopolitical thought, that is, the final chapter of Esposito's trilogy, "The Philosophy of *Bíos*" (2008, 146–194), develops what could be called a counter-philosophy of life, one targeted at "overturning the Nazi politics of death in a politics that is no longer over life but *of* life" (Esposito 2008, 11): an "affirmative biopolitics" that, far from endlessly pursuing the protection of life, attempts to liberate a sense of "power or potentiality proper to life itself" (Prozorov 2017, 804). While it is true that, as Sergei Prozorov remarks, this politics "remains entirely in the future" (2017, 804), it is nonetheless the case that Esposito is attempting to turn up within biopolitics a possibility that is largely unthought within the tradition: that biopolitics may harbour within itself—in the additional sense of constraining, to be sure—some possibility, some chance of being *other* than the

subjection of life to forces of protection or negation, optimisation or denudation. Esposito's argument, as it develops across several books, requires patient explication, and here it may appear, at least at first, as if we have set off on a different trajectory, one that would set aside autoimmunity in favour of an analysis of immunity instead. But—and without jumping too far ahead—as we will see, Esposito comes to posit, as an essential and indispensable element of this affirmative (counter-)biopolitics, something like an immunity against immunity, a mechanism that facilitates the survival of the living by perpetually exposing it to alterity. It is in this way that Esposito's work might be seen to take into account the effects of the logic of autoimmunity, and to develop an alternate view of biopolitics predicated on exposure rather than only immunitary protection.

Esposito's elaboration of a new philosophy of life in *Bíos* emerges out of his extensive analysis of the concepts of community and immunity across the two preceding books of the trilogy. Central to this analysis is the relationship between the two concepts in their "original meaning": *community*, for Esposito, is the generalisation or sharing of the *munus*, which refers to an obligation, duty, or debt to be repaid (but never one received); *immunity* refers to a condition of exception or exemption from this originary obligation (Esposito 2011, 6). Sharing in the *munus*, for Esposito, is both more and less than paying taxes: "it is something that… expropriates [its subjects] of their initial property (in part or completely), of the most proper property, namely, their very subjectivity" (Esposito 2010a, 6–7). The *munus*, then, is an obligation somewhat akin to that elaborated in chapter 4 with reference to the work of Caputo, insofar as it is a condition of primary exposure to others that makes the subjects of community radically improper to themselves (Esposito 2010a, 6–7). Immunity is therefore privative, "the negative… form of *communitas*": "If *communitas* is that relation, which in binding its members to an obligation of reciprocal donation, jeopardises individual identity, *immunitas* is the condition of dispensation from such an obligation and therefore the defense against the expropriating features of *communitas*" (Esposito 2008, 50). As Timothy Campbell summarises, "immunity connotes the means by which the individual is defended from the 'expropriative effects' of the community, protecting the one who carries it from the risk of contact with those who do not (the risk being precisely the loss of individual identity)" (in Esposito 2008, xi).

What is distinctly modern and dangerous for Esposito, however, is *immunisation*, understood as the active inducement of immunity. Esposito's description of immunitary logic more or less follows the contours of inoculation (although, at some points, he also describes it as "homeopathic"); it consists in presupposing a particular threat in advance of contact with that threat; and, further, in introjecting that threat in a controlled form (Esposito 2011, 7–8). For Esposito, this logic defines modern biopolitics' paradoxical form: that life's protection is pursued through "continuously giving it a taste of death" (Esposito 2011, 9). While he acknowledges that "the demand for self-preservation… is far more ancient and long-lasting than the modern epoch" (Esposito 2008, 54), it is only in the logic of immunisation that "biopolitics reveal[s] its specifically modern genesis" (2008, 9), precisely as the negative protection of life. If it is in the modern period that immunisation emerges as the mode of biopolitics, it is in totalitarianism, and specifically Nazism, for Esposito, that for the first time "the politicity of *bíos* is… affirmed absolutely": that life becomes fully "translatable into politics" and politics is capable of assuming an "*intrinsically* biopolitical characterization" (2008, 9), through this logic. It is in Nazism, he writes, that

> not only the negative (which is to say the work of death) will be functionalized to stabilize order (as certainly was still the case in the modern period), but it will be produced in growing quantities according to a thanatopolitical dialectic that is bound to condition the strengthening of life vis-à-vis the ever more extensive realization of death. (Esposito 2008, 9)

Nazism was, for Esposito, the paroxysmal implosion of a process or strategy of immunisation culminating in its own self-destruction: what he calls autoimmunity, giving to that a term a meaning that diverges from Derrida's. That is, in Esposito's view, the logic of immunisation risks spiralling into ever-greater and more violent forms that culminate in a "destiny of self-destruction" (Esposito 2008, 146):

> Consider what happens in autoimmune diseases when the immune system becomes so strong that it turns against the very mechanism that should be defended and winds up destroying it. Certainly, we need immune systems. No individual or social body could do without them, but when they grow out of proportion they end up forcing the entire organism to explode or implode. (Esposito 2013, 62)

Esposito maintains that this particular autoimmunitary "tonality" was exported and generalised to the world, from its most extreme form in Nazism to the preventive, anticipatory, and "self-confuting" forms of contemporary biopolitics (Esposito 2008, 146–47). But unlike Derrida's formulation of a generalised autoimmunity, autoimmunity in Esposito's account is used only to describe such self-destructive excesses, as a danger that manifests only as the result of crossing a certain threshold of immunitary intensification, and hence as a term that bears no positive or promissory valence (Esposito 2013, 61; 2011, 17, 162–63; Deutscher 2013, 55–56).

Despite its dangers, however, it is also in immunity, Esposito claims, that the preliminary contours of an affirmative biopolitics can be found. He argues in *Immunitas* that a new interpretive possibility has begun to emerge in recent research in immunology, one that "situates immunity in a nonexcluding relation with its common opposite" (Esposito 2011, 17). For Esposito, an affirmative reconceptualisation of immunity figures the immune system as "an internal resonance chamber, like the diaphragm through which difference, as such, engages and traverses us" (Esposito 2011, 18). Such a conceptualisation removes the "negative power" of immunity; that is, it makes immunity the process by which "immune selves" are individuated and sustained by what is foreign to them (Esposito 2011, 17–18). The figure of such an affirmative conception of immunity for Esposito is the implant, and, in particular, the paradoxical status of the foetus, understood as an implant in the process of gestation. The paradox of gestational tolerance, for immunology, lies in the fact that the foetus is fundamentally foreign to the maternal body, and yet, in the case of pregnancies brought to term, it is not rejected by the body's immune system. The foetus can be understood as a semi-allograft or semi-allogenic transplant—that is, having genetic material that is both foreign and the same as the gestator's body—that is tolerated unlike any other allograft (Warning, McCracken and Morris 2011, 715; La Rocca et al. 2014, 41). For Esposito, this paradoxical relation serves as a privileged example, insofar as he reads it as demonstrating two possibilities for a reconfigured immunity: that the immune "self" can be understood not as a stable, bordered whole, but a dynamic construct engaged in a continual process of individuation through encounters with others (2011, 169); and that immune mechanisms can be seen not merely as destructive and self-destructive, but as productive and

protective of the life of the other (2011, 170–71). Following immunologist Alfred Tauber, who argues that immunity can be understood as a process "that always involves an open system of self-definition that consistently produces self and other" (Esposito 2011, 169; see Tauber 1997), Esposito argues that the logic of implantation demonstrates that

> the self is no longer a genetic constant or a pre-established repertoire but rather a construct determined by a set of dynamic factors, compatible groupings, fortuitous encounters; nor is it a subject or an object, but rather, a principle of action. (2011, 169)

Not unlike the interpretation of transplantation pursued in chapter 1, then, Esposito posits the implant as what demonstrates the "prior impropriety" or fundamental estrangement of the "self." The most potent figure of the implant for Esposito is the foetus, and it is in the gestational relationship that he extends this thought of selfhood in community to establish immunity's reconfigured relationship to collective life. In the case of gestational tolerance, he argues that the gestator's immune system works "on a double front"; on the one hand, "it is directed toward controlling the foetus," while on the other "it is also controlling itself" (Esposito 2011, 170). That is, he suspects—like many immunologists, although the precise workings of gestational tolerance are far from established (see Warning, McCracken and Morris 2011)—that the immune system "immunizes itself against an excess of immunization" (Esposito 2011, 170), which is to say, certain mechanisms of "normal" immune functioning are held at bay by other constituent elements of the immune system, with the result that the foetus is not destroyed but instead protected. Crucially, he argues that "the entire operation is performed as part of the immune function activities—and not as a failure to act" (2011, 170); that is, that the tolerance of the foetus is not the absence of immunity, nor external to its function. Hence he argues:

> This is the ultimate—and prime—issue around which the entire immune paradigm wraps itself until reaching the point where it becomes indistinguishable from its opposite, "community": the force of the immune attack is precisely what keeps alive that which it should normally destroy. The mother is pitted against the child and the child against the mother, and yet what results from this conflict is the spark of life. Contrary to the metaphor of a fight to the death, what takes place in the mother's

> womb is a fight "to life," proving that difference and conflict are not necessarily destructive… A perspective is thus opened up within the immunitary logic that overturns its prevailing interpretation. From this perspective, nothing remains of the incompatibility between self and other. The other is the form the self takes where inside intersects with outside, the proper with the common, immunity with community. (Esposito 2011, 171)

For Esposito, immunity "itself" becomes the facilitator of tolerance, understood as a non-appropriative hospitality to the other. Thus community and collective life can now "be recognized as an interruption and transformation of immunity," as Greg Bird writes (2016, 175); and immunity as "an internal resonance chamber, like the diaphragm through which difference, as such, engages and traverses us" (Esposito 2011, 18). What this view of implantation offers, then, is the possibility of grasping something affirmative of collective life, rather than only of forces of protection and privation, *within* the immunitary paradigm: it only requires that we "refocus the mechanisms of the immunitary *dispositif*" (Bird 2016, 175). While the notion of the implant is only returned to briefly in the final book of the trilogy, *Bíos* (2008, 168), it nonetheless serves as the impetus for the developments of the counter-philosophy of life developed therein, insofar as it signals—from *within* the immunitary paradigm—the possibility of reversing the tendency of biopolitics to slide into thanatopolitics, and thereby the chance of transforming immunity into "the custodian and producer of life" (Esposito 2013, 133; Langford 2015, 141, 147).

This also forms the basis for Esposito's methodological approach in the final chapter of *Bíos*. For Esposito, the *terms*, or in the Italian, the *termini*, of politics—the terms through which we comprehend it, as well as its external limits, extremes, and its ends—are precisely what must be rethought if collective life is to have any future: Esposito's work "aspires to a *terminological reform dedicated to life*" (Neyrat 2010, 32). As in the discovery of an affirmative declension of immunity within the immunitary paradigm, the terms of an affirmative philosophy of life are to be found at the extremes of the philosophy of life that everywhere turns biopolitics into thanatopolitics. He writes:

> If we are to open the black box of biopolitics we shouldn't limit ourselves to skirting Nazi semantics, or for that matter confronting it from the outside. Something more

> is required and it has to do with penetrating within it and overturning one by one its bio-thanatological principles. (Esposito 2008, 157).

That is, insofar as Nazism represents the most extreme and terrifying form of biopolitics' collapsing of the categories of life and the political through the immunitary apparatus, and therefore constitutes the culmination of this immunitary logic in the most extreme reversal of biopolitics into thanatopolitics, Nazism marks, for Esposito, the "occasion for an epochal rethinking" (Esposito 2008, 10). The principles that form the basis for this rethinking are "three *dispositifs*" central to his analysis of Nazi bio-thanatopolitics: the "double enclosure of the body," the "preemptive suppression of birth," and the "normativization of life" (Esposito 2008, 157). These are refigured by Esposito as the interconnected concepts of "flesh," "birth," and "the vital norm," as the "admittedly approximate and provisional contours of an affirmative biopolitics" (2008, 11) through a process he describes as "overturn[ing] them and then… turn[ing] them inside out" (2008, 157). That process, he writes, consists in "assuming the same categories of 'life,' 'body,' and 'birth,' and then of converting their immunitary (which is to say self-negating) declension in a direction that is open to a more originary and intense sense of *communitas*. Only in this way… will it be possible to trace the initial features of a biopolitics that is finally affirmative." (Esposito 2008, 157)

By addressing the first of these *dispositifs*, the "double enclosure of the body," Esposito finds another possibility in the concept of "flesh," in a move that refers to and extends the logic of implantation elaborated in *Immunitas*. The double enclosure, he writes, refers to "the chaining of the subject onto his own body and… the incorporation of such a body in that extensive body of the German ethnic community" under Nazism (Esposito 2008, 157). Esposito elaborates a series of "incorporations" according to this logic, which together serve to make biology and politics coincide completely. The notions of self and body are collapsed together in the notion of race, in a "dual procedure of the biologization of the spirit and the spiritualization of the body" that "constitutes the nucleus of Nazi biopolitics" (Esposito 2008, 217n83). He writes, "more than a reduction of *bíos* to *zōē* or to 'bare life' (which the Nazis always opposed to the fullness of life understood in a spiritual sense as well), we need to speak of the spiritualization of *zōē* and the biologization of the spirit" (Esposito 2008, 142). This enfolding of the "spirit" and biological life, in a paradoxical sense,

on the one hand means that "Nazism's transcendental *is life*" (Esposito 2013, 84, emphasis mine), and on the other makes for "the impossibility of any transcendence" (Esposito 2008, 142). That is, he claims, Nazism made of the notion of "spirit" "the means not to open the body towards transcendence, but rather to a further and more definitive enclosing" on the biological (Esposito 2008, 141). While the first enclosure takes place "at the "level of the individual and the incorporation of the self within his own body," the second part of this operation takes place at the level of the population,

> by means of which every corporeal member finds himself in turn incorporated into a larger body that constitutes the organic totality of the German people. It is only this second incorporation that confers on the first its spiritual value, not in contrast to, but rather on the basis of, its biological configuration. (Esposito 2008, 142)

Finally, a "third incorporation"—which is rather a second stage in the incorporation of the individual body into the national body—is to be found in "the vertical line of hereditary patrimony" that connects "all the single bodies with the one body of the German community" (Esposito 2008, 142). By way of this "triple incorporation," Esposito argues,

> the body of every German will completely adhere to itself, not as simple flesh, an existence without life, but as the incarnation of the racial substance from which life itself receives its essential form—provided, naturally, that it has the force to expel from itself all of that which doesn't belong to it (and for which reason hampers its expansive power). (Esposito 2008, 142)

That is, it is through these attempts at closure that politics takes the form of the protection of life thus conceived, and by which the assurance of life takes the form of genocide according to a prophylactic logic of immunisation: "it is only through the removal of the infected part" of the nation conceived as a body whose health and spiritual value derives from the racial purity of its members that this enclosure can be made absolute (Esposito 2008, 143, 165; Mills 2018, 100).

Where Esposito finds the possibility of an alternative to this bio-thanatopolitics is in what this logic of double enclosure necessarily produces as a "remnant" (Mills 2018, 100),

considered by Nazism "existence without life," "all that does not have the racial qualifications necessary to integrate ethnically the individual body with that of the collective" (Esposito 2008, 159). He suggests that "perhaps a more meaningful term" than "existence" is "*flesh*":

> because it is intrinsic to the same body from which it seems to escape (and which therefore expels it). Existence without life is flesh that does not coincide with the body; it is that part or zone of the body, the body's membrane, that isn't one with the body, that exceeds its boundaries or is subtracted from the body's enclosing. (Esposito 2008, 159)

With reference to Merleau-Ponty, Nancy, and Derrida, he argues that the notion of the flesh, and with it, incarnation, must be "rethought outside of Christian language" (Esposito 2008, 168), as "not only devoid of spirit, but [as] flesh that doesn't even have a body" (Espostio 2008, 167). What he gains from Merleau-Ponty, however, is the thought of the flesh as "shared by the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 248); on Esposito's reading, "it is precisely living flesh that constitutes the tissue of relations between existence and the world" (Esposito 2008, 160). In contrast to the logic of double enclosure, flesh, for Esposito, refers to the body's "exteriorization" (Esposito 2008, 163). Moreover, *as* that "tissue of relations between existence and the world," flesh articulates "the political as the primordial relationship between politics and life" (Langford 2015, 185), in excess of the identification of politics with the body (through the notions, for instance, of spiritual body and body politic). The flesh must be thought, Esposito argues, "as the archetypal possibility of" the body's "simultaneously ontological, technological, and political transmutation" (Esposito 2010b, 94). Where he departs significantly from Merleau-Ponty is in attempting to elaborate a "non-Christian form of incarnation" (Esposito 2008, 168). He writes, if

> incorporation tends to unify a plurality, or at least a duality, incarnation, on the contrary, separates and multipl[ies] in two what was originally one. In the first case, we are dealing with a doubling that doesn't keep aggregated elements distinct; in the second, a splitting that modifies and subdivides an initial identity. (Esposito 2008, 167)

While the internal contradiction of incarnation—that of the "two-in-one or the one-that-is-made-two"—"appears logically unthinkable for classical culture," recent biotechnologies, he claims, appear as forms of non-Christian incarnation:

> What in the experience of the prosthesis (of the transplant or the implant) penetrates into the human organism is no longer the divine, but the organ of another person [*uomo*]; or something that doesn't live, that "divinely" allows the person to live and improve the quality of his or her life. (Esposito 2008, 168)

Hence for Esposito, "flesh" is a form of life that precedes and exceeds the body, opening "life" to difference without therefore subsuming—in incorporation—that difference. Flesh, as Miguel Vatter writes, "is what always already opens the self onto others, and thus corresponds to the *munus*, to the expenditure of self that establishes community with an other" (Vatter 2009, n.p.). As what exposes life to difference, flesh therefore serves as the primary material for a biopolitics that could counter the *dispositif* of incorporation—one that could capture the "very idea of *communitas*" (Esposito 2010b, 94), and in which "the immunitary enclosure of the body gives way to irreducible multiplicity" (Mills 2018, 100).

This notion of the flesh opens the way for Esposito to rethink what he identifies as the second *dispositif* of Nazi bio-thanatopolitics, the preemptive suppression of birth. He argues that what appears to be a contradiction within Nazism—"between a politics of increasing the birthrate and the antinatalism produced first by a negative eugenics and then by the elimination en masse of pregnant mothers" (Esposito 2008, 169)—is resolved (as contradiction) in light of the (auto)immunitary logic of the Nazi philosophy of life. Biopolitical thought, absent Esposito's insights regarding the paradigm of immunisation, "furnishes a first response," he suggests, in "identifying… the root of the genocidal discrimination in excess of political investment on life" (Esposito 2008, 169). But, he suggests, "a more essential motivation" can be found in tracing the relationship of birth and nation, beyond the territory mapped out by others—for example, by Derrida. Like Derrida in *Politics of Friendship* (2005b)—and indeed referring to that text—Esposito argues that "just as the body constitutes the site of the presupposed unification of the anomalous multiplicity of flesh, so the nation defines the domain in which all births are connected to

each other in a sort of parental identity that extends to the boundaries of the state" (Esposito 2008, 171). Yet, he claims, Nazism "marks both a development and a variation" on this definition, in the value therein assigned to birth. Under Nazism, that is, birth is not only what assures membership in the nation, but rather, birth becomes the domain in which biological life and the political horizon become coextensive: "If the state is *really* the body of its inhabitants… politics is nothing other than the modality through which birth is affirmed as the only living force of history" (Esposito 2008, 171). He argues that, therefore, to consider the mechanisms aimed at the suppression of birth as mere parts of a more general project of extermination "would mean losing sight of the profound meaning of such an event" (Esposito 2008, 144). That is, for Esposito, understanding the specific significance attributed to birth under Nazism reveals a certain power or *threat* to the Nazi bio-thanatopolitical project *at work in birth itself*. While it would be tempting to see the work of the Nazi eugenic project as only targeting and preventing specific pregnancies, therefore, Esposito suggests that its pursuit through, on the one hand, extreme violence—including forced abortions, sterilisations, and murders of pregnant women—and, on the other, a pro-natalist campaign that included the outlawing of voluntary abortion, hints at a more profound fear of birth *in general* (Esposito 2008, 144, 176). Both operations of pro- and anti-natalism, for Esposito, are united in their function of subordinating birth to political control, which is to say, attempting to immunise against the dangers that birth itself posed: "they felt and feared that, rather than ensuring the continuity of the ethnic filiation, birth dispersed and weakened it" (Esposito 2008, 176). The reason, he suggests, is that birth is an exemplary form of the production of difference: it consists in a doubling and estrangement whose effect is incarnation. "Anything but ordered toward unifying the two (or the many in the one)," as the logic of incorporation would be, he claims, "birth is destined to subdivide the one (the body of the mother) into two, before the subsequent births in turn multiply those in the plurality of infinite numbers" (Esposito 2008, 176). Far from serving an immunising function, then, what he finds in birth is the production of an "irreducible difference with respect to all those who have come before" (2008, 176), which, he claims, means that birth therefore "cannot be used, in either a real sense or a metaphoric sense, as protective apparatus for the self-protection of life" (2008, 176).

It is this "innovative power" of birth that turns Esposito toward the work of Hannah Arendt, for whom birth is, in Esposito's words, "a beginning that repeats itself an infinite number of times, unravelling lines of life that are always different" (Esposito 2008, 177). For Esposito, Arendt's insistence on the "originary politicity of birth" (2008, 177) directly confronts the Nazi relation to birth, both in the suppression of birth "so as to dry up the source of political action" and in the attempted control of birth as "the biopolitical mechanism for leading every form of life back to bare life" (2008, 178). For Arendt, natality and mortality are necessary conditions for what she delineates in the early pages of *The Human Condition* as the "three fundamental human activities" of labour, work, and action, but of the three, "action"—the "political activity par excellence"—"has the closest connection with the human condition of natality" (Arendt 2018, 9). While labour and work, for Arendt, are both activities directed to material ends, action is "the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter" (Arendt 2018, 7): "humans may *labor*, expending their biological powers in creating and maintaining life, they may *work* to produce artifacts" (Smith 2011, 137), but to act, "in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin… to set something into motion" (Arendt 2018, 177). This act of beginning, for Arendt, is possible on the basis of the human condition of natality, a concept which takes on a range of interrelated meanings stemming from "the new beginning inherent in birth" (Arendt 2018, 9). Arendt distinguishes between the "fact of birth" and the insertion of "ourselves into the human world" through action, which is "like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance" (Arendt 2018, 176). It is our status as natal beings, "newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth," that prompts action (Arendt 2018, 177). Hence natality also serves to describe "the *human agent as perennial beginner*, who, by acting and speaking, can *begin something new in history*" (Diprose and Ziarek 2018, 4). This act of beginning "something new in history" in turn derives its significance and possibility from the condition of human plurality: "while all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life" (Arendt 2018, 8). Moreover, this plurality too "rests on the fact of natality, through which the human world is constantly invaded by strangers, newcomers whose actions and reactions cannot be foreseen by those who are already there and are going to leave in a short while" (Arendt 1961, 61). For Arendt, therefore, the effects

of the fact of birth—that it produces the human as a perennial beginner in a world of strangers, whose appearance and actions are themselves natal in this regard—provide the impulse for political action "in its own innovative power" (Esposito 2008, 177).

Arendt's affirmation of the natality of action stands as a defence of human life against what she sees, in the modern age, as the subjugation of human life to "life itself," "the possibly everlasting life process of the species mankind" (Arendt 2018, 321). In the final chapter of *The Human Condition*, she offers a stark warning:

> Even now, laboring is too lofty, too ambitious a word for what we are doing, or think we are doing, in the world we have come to live in. The last stage of the laboring society, the society of jobholders, demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though individual life had actually been submerged in the all-over life process of the species… It is quite conceivable that the modern age—which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity—may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known. (Arendt 2018, 322)

That is, well before the emergence of the term, Arendt diagnoses what comes to be for Esposito (following Agamben) a defining characteristic of biopolitical logic, that of making "biological survival the highest good" (Esposito 2008, 149). But where, Esposito argues, Arendt falls short in thinking biopolitics, despite her elaboration of its "modern roots," is in her decisive separation of the spheres of the vital and the political, such that "the term 'biopolitics'… emerges devoid of any sense" (Esposito 2008, 149–50). Likewise, Agamben suggests that "it is precisely the absence of any biopolitical perspective" that limits her analysis (Agamben 1998, 120). That is, Arendt's dissociation of the political from the materiality of life means—Agamben contends—that she is incapable of determining that the "decisive event of modernity" (Agamben 1998, 4) is in fact the "radical transformation of politics *into* the realm of bare life" (1998, 120; emphasis mine): "the politicization of bare life as such" (1998, 4). For Esposito, despite the fact that Arendt incisively interprets the emergence of modern biopolitics, her "unverified premise" that "the only valid form of political activity is what is attributable to the experience of the Greek *polis*" (i.e., action performed in freedom from biological necessity) produces a "blind spot" (Esposito 2008,

150): not only toward the specifically biopolitical character of the modern age, but therefore also toward the possibilities for resisting the complete biopoliticisation of life. As Rosalyn Diprose and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek add, citing Esposito, Arendt's equation of "genuine politics with what is understood conventionally as the public realm… tends to rule out the possibility of political action emerging from activities where 'the materiality of life unfolds' " (Diprose and Ziarek 2018, 61). That is to say, this premise not only problematises moves to situate Arendt's work "within a proper biopolitical horizon" (Esposito 2008, 177), but also frustrates attempts to forge a counter-philosophy of life on its basis: on Esposito's reading, "where there is an authentic politics, a space of meaning for the production of life cannot be opened; and where the materiality of life unfolds, something like political action can no longer emerge" (Esposito 2008, 150). However, Esposito claims that the "*political* relevance that Arendt attributes to the phenomenon of birth gains more prominence," not merely in spite of, but rather "on the basis" of the extraneousness of Arendt's work to biopolitical thought (Esposito 2008, 177). That is, if, for Arendt, "it is in the event of birth that politics finds the originary impulse of its own innovative power," Esposito finds that it is precisely *from* the vital that the politicality of action is generated (Esposito 2008, 177), Arendt's decisive separation *of* the political and vital notwithstanding. Indeed, despite Arendt's characterisation of it as "what distinguishes man most clearly from the animal, what exists from what lives, politics from nature," birth for Esposito "has directly to do with the animality of man," insofar as he reads natality as, if not synonymous with, then at minimum the effect of the fact of birth (Esposito 2008, 179). It is as if, he concludes, that despite the unthinkability of "biopolitics" as such within Arendt's political ontology, that she is forced to acknowledge that the reorientation of all human activity to biological necessity can only be confronted from within biopolitics' own schema: with a revitalised thought of birth as the threshold in which "life is given form in a modality that is drastically different from its own biological bareness" (Esposito 2008, 178).

Unsurprisingly, he finds that Arendt's reference to birth is insufficient to determine an affirmative biopolitics (Esposito 2008, 179). What he looks for in the work of Gilbert Simondon, instead, is a way to elaborate the relationship between the natality of action—understood as both individuation and innovation (or, in Arendt's terminology, individuation and initiative)—and the vital. "Out of what vital layer of life is the politicity of action

generated? How are the individual and genus linked in the public sphere?"—these are questions to which Simondon's work furnishes a "diagonal response" (Esposito 2008, 179). He appropriates two key ideas from Simondon: firstly, "a dynamic conception of being that identifies it with becoming," and secondly, "an interpretation of this becoming as a process of successive individuations in diverse and concatenated domains" (Esposito 2008, 179). Moreover, these successive individuations are identified with birth (Esposito 2008, 180–81): "*to live is to perpetuate a birth that is permanent and relative*" (Simondon in Esposito 2008, 181). This conception of life as birth, and birth as individuation, cuts across species lines: the differences between the human and the living in general, the animal and the vegetal are mere "transitions" of the order of birth. Esposito writes:

> Every step in each phase, and therefore every individuation, is a birth on a different level, from the moment that a new "form of life" is disclosed, so that one could say that birth isn't a phenomenon of life, but life is a phenomenon of birth; or also that life and birth are superimposed in an inextricable knot that makes one the margin of opening of the other. (Esposito 2008, 181)

In this way, Esposito sees in Simondon not only a way to refute Arendt's insistence on action as a mark of human distinction, but a way to return the political, identified with action, to the vital; as Philippe Lynes writes, "the subject of will, representation, and action is never separated from its presubjective 'living roots,' its organic materiality and ecological inscription: only a difference of degree passes through the human and other animals" (Lynes 2018, 207). In this regard Simondon provides the perspective that Esposito argues Arendt cannot, reinscribing the natality of action "where the materiality of life unfolds" (Esposito 2008, 150). Moreover, the superimposition of birth and life that Esposito reads in Simondon offers a powerful counter to the superimposition of life and death that he diagnoses in Nazi bio-thanatopolitics and the immunitary paradigm that defines modern biopolitics: "the only way for life to defer death isn't to preserve it as such (perhaps in the immunitary form of negative protection), but rather to be reborn continually in different guises" (Esposito 2008, 181).

It is Esposito's intent that this refigured natality can counter the negative power of immunity—the protection of life through the production of death in ever-increasing

proportions—by positing life, instead, as the inevitable proliferation of irreducible difference. This view of life as birth is supplemented by the logic of incarnation, understood as the necessary exposure of life to difference, against which no immunitary measures—the annihilation of difference, whether through incorporation, death, or the suppression of life in advance—can protect. Both the innovative power of the vital and the excorporating power of flesh thus come together in the figure of life as birth:

> Rather than enclosing the extraneousness within the same biological or political body (and so cancelling it), birth now puts [*rovescia*] what is within the maternal womb outside. It doesn't incorporate, but excorporates, exteriorizes, and bends outside [*estroflette*]. It doesn't assume or impose but exposes someone (male or female) to the event of existence. Therefore, it cannot be used, in either a real sense or a metaphoric sense, as protective apparatus for the self-protection of life. At the moment in which the umbilical cord is cut and the newborn cleaned of amniotic fluid, he or she is situated in an irreducible difference with respect to all those who have come before. (Esposito 2008, 176)

These two refigured *dispositifs* together bring into focus the sense of "power or potentiality proper to life itself" (Prozorov 2017, 804) that Esposito's work looks to liberate from biopolitics' constraining form. They also begin to furnish a response to the problematic prompted by the investigation of autoimmunity's political implications developed herein. Esposito's affirmative biopolitics, that is, insofar as it attempts to grasp a "more originary and intense sense of *communitas*" (Esposito 2008, 157), renders collective life the experience of perpetual individuation that takes place through the flesh, as the opening of the living being to what is outside of it.

At this point, Esposito would seem to have provided those "initial features" of a biopolitics that exceeds the biopolitical frame's otherwise singular focus on the immunitary protection of life. Before moving on to the final *dispositif* that Esposito looks to overturn, however, it is worth registering some of the questions that arise from reading the philosophy of *bíos* in the context of the account of autoimmunity as nonpower developed in the previous chapters, particularly insofar as this framing may complicate the innovative power that Esposito attributes to life itself. We *could*, perhaps, rewrite Esposito's rendering of life in

terms belonging to Derrida's oeuvre: perhaps, as life conditioned by an autoimmune vulnerability that opens it to unpredictable invention. But to do so would be to inscribe in Esposito's work two absent elements: firstly, a characterisation of natality, understood as invention or arrival, as the effect of a capacity or "nonpower" to be affected, where Esposito's natality appears—although not without some ambivalence—largely *sui generis*, immanent to life "itself," and indeed even to "*a* life" in the singular (Esposito 2008, 157; italics mine). Secondly, it would impose on Esposito's thought of life a risk that is, if not unthinkable, then unacknowledged; that in being laid open to the differences instituted by life as perpetual birth, we do not know in advance what will be invented, and whether it will turn out to have harmed us.

Outside of the particular problematic of autoimmunity pursued here, Catherine Mills and Penelope Deutscher both raise similar questions of Esposito's natality. Mills takes issue with the conclusions that Esposito draws from Simondon, arguing that

> the problem with this approach is that birth is entirely metaphoric and disembodied: birth is not only a perpetual feature of life, but that life is ultimately born of nothing. The birth at issue is simply a metaphor for the new, and is certainly not the bloody, painful and often highly technologized and medicalized separation of one body from another, specifically, from the body of a woman. (Mills 2018, 151)

While Mills's analysis emphasises female specificity, and the ways in which women's bodies and reproductive capacity are situated within the schema of biopolitics, she also identifies a similar concern to that raised in this chapter with respect to the situation of Esposito's work as a response to the problem of thinking autoimmunity in a biopolitical frame. We cannot only attribute to Esposito the depiction of life as "ultimately born of nothing," since even he notes Arendt's apparent lack of concern for the material facts of conception, gestation, and birth (Esposito 2008, 179). Moreover, it is not entirely the case that birth in Esposito appears wholly *sui generis*, as Mills would have it: birth is dependent on the flesh as what places the living being in common with others, in much the same way that natality, for Arendt, produces the condition of plurality that itself makes natal action, "like a second birth," necessary and possible (Arendt 2018, 176). Esposito writes that the subject "produced by individuating itself" through birth "is not definable outside of the political relationship with

those that share the same vital experience, but also with that collective which far from being its simple contrary or the neutralization of individuality, is itself a form of more elaborate individuation" (Esposito 2008, 181–82). Yet he appears to situate the innovative power of birth entirely on the side of the *living*, as internal if not also proper to it. The issue, in other words, is not so much that the life of any individual organism is born of nothing—since for Esposito these successive individuations are the consequence of exposure—but rather that *what* the living being is exposed to as a consequence of the matrix of natality and flesh is nothing but *more life*. Esposito's depiction of life figures all of the transformative and inventive capacity of natality on the side of life itself, even while it cuts across the thresholds that separate one form of life from another—excluding, therefore, the possibility of transformative encounters with anything that cannot be subsumed under the category of the "vital," such as an inorganic implant or prosthesis, or indeed death.

Hence also the significance of Mills's invocation of the possibility—if not necessity—of birth as "bloody" and "painful." While the argument could be made for Esposito's refigured birth as mere metaphor, the omission of any attendant dangers of natality comes as something of a surprise, particularly given his depiction in *Immunitas* of gestation as conflict, wherein "the mother is pitted against the child and the child against the mother" (Esposito 2011, 171)—an image that Mills also objects to on the grounds of its reliance on "obviously pro-life rhetoric" (Mills 2018, 96)—and the vignettes that constitute the prefatory material of *Bíos*, many of which depict the cruelties of the administration and control of birth, including sex-selective abortion and genocidal rape (Esposito 2008, 3–7). To add briefly to Mills's criticism regarding Esposito's lack of attention to reproductive biopolitics, Penelope Deutscher also notes the conflation in *Bíos* of the murders of pregnant women and other forms of the preemptive suppression of birth—forced abortions and sterilisations—"as if they can be grouped under the same rubric of suppression of life," which is to say, rendering women a mere vector of "life" in the figure of maternity, and exempting the biopoliticisation of the foetus from any sustained scrutiny (Deutscher 2017, 115). But further, in another text (2013), which remains one of the few to attend in a sustained manner to the potential intersections between Esposito's work and Derrida's autoimmunity, Deutscher draws a similar observation to Mills regarding the apparently sanitised depiction of birth and gestation in *Immunitas* and *Bíos*. This observation takes us beyond the question of the

accuracy of Esposito's natal metaphors to a consideration of the potential consequences of his affirmation of birth as the "only way for life to defer death" (Esposito 2008, 181). She suggests that the way in which Esposito draws on both "literal and non-literal references to 'birth' " across the two texts, as well as *Terms of the Political*, is "emblematic of the divergence between Derrida and Esposito" (Deutscher 2013, 60). She argues that Esposito's account of gestation in *Immunitas*

> excludes the vagaries of pregnancy potentially destructive to the mother. He gives his attention to the fetal enhancement of the mother's immune system but not to phenomena threatening the mother's life. Accordingly, the phenomena doing service as emblematic figures of community and openness towards the other here will not include gestational diabetes, ectopic pregnancy, preeclampsia, and eclampsia—nor scenarios ranging from post-partum depression to matricide, or other negative inflections potentially associable with the unpredictable aspects of the fetus and pregnancy. (Deutscher 2013, 61)

That is, across both *Immunitas* and *Bios*, gestation and birth remain, despite the unpredictability that Esposito ascribes to them, curiously *teleological*: gestation, as the preliminary figure for overturning the destructive immunitary mechanisms emblematic of modern biopolitics, takes place in the name of life, and results apparently inevitably in "the spark of life" (Esposito 2011, 171), while birth, in all its "innovative power," unravels "lines of life that are always different" (Esposito 2008, 177), endlessly deferring death through perpetual rebirth (2008, 181). Of course, in one sense this is hardly a criticism; it's precisely Esposito's point—to refocus the mechanisms of immunity such that it no longer bears its "negative power" (Esposito 2011, 18). Anything else, for Esposito, would lead only to autoimmune self-destruction. And Deutscher acknowledges as much: "True, Esposito is engaged in a project of offering positive alternative images to the thanatopolitical capture of birth" (Deutscher 2013, 50). But, she continues,

> where birth is associated (in this reconfiguration) with the figure of welcomed, unpredictable alterity of life, there is no *affirmative* representation of the fact that the multiple variations of the anticipation of life must also include an anticipation of the monstrous. (Deutscher 2013, 50)

That is, the issue in Esposito's reconfigured natality is not so much its distance from the material facts of conception, gestation, and parturition, although these might all potentially be included under the category of the monstrous; rather, the issue is that if birth is to be affirmed as what opens life to unpredictable transformation, its results must be precisely that—unpredictable. As Deutscher argues, Esposito "looks for alternatives, for the possibility of an affirmative biopolitics, and this in lieu of affirming the necessary possibility of monstrosity and catastrophe at work in exposure to transformation" (Deutscher 2013, 63).

But the overturning of the final *dispositif* of *Bíos* can also be read as a response to this problem, although for Mills and Deutscher it will ultimately remain unsatisfying. Esposito identifies Nazism's third immunitary *dispositif* as the "*absolute normativization of life*" (Esposito 2008, 182). Esposito argues that within the Nazi regime, for the first time "the two semantic vectors of immunity, the biological and the juridical… [were] completely superimposed according to the double register of the biologization of the *nomos* and simultaneously the juridicalization of *bíos*" (Esposito 2008, 138). Esposito recounts the numerous ways in which Nazi biopolitics saw the mutual superimposition of "medical and political-juridical power" (Esposito 2008, 140) in which diagnosis and treatment became "no longer private… but public function[s]" (2008, 139), as evidenced by the roles of physicians in legal commissions and courts, and the reverse, the "extensive juridical (and therefore political) control of medicine" (2008, 139). Moreover, he argues, it is "precisely the claim that life is supreme" that provokes life's "absolute subordination to politics" (Esposito 2008, 140), and further, resulted in the production of death according to the genocidal logic at work in the two other *dispositifs*: "directly applying itself to life, Nazi law subjected it to a norm of death" (Esposito 2008, 184). In Esposito's view, it was precisely the positing of the protection of life as of the utmost value that saw it enclosed, exterminated, and nullified in advance, according to juridical norms that sought to purify it.

The way out, for Esposito, is not to attempt to distinguish more clearly between life and norm, but rather, as with the previous *dispositifs*, to invert the relation established in Nazi bio-thanatopolitics toward an affirmation of life, arguing that what is needed "to oppose the Nazi normativization of life" is an attempt to vitalise the norm (Esposito 2008,

184). He looks to the work of philosophers of immanence—first to Spinoza's theory of natural right (Esposito 2008, 185), which, he argues, "makes the norm the principle of unlimited equivalence for every single form of life" (2008, 186). That is, he reads in Spinoza an attempt to consider the norm not as serving a controlling or prescriptive function, but rather, as the expression of the (unpredictable) nature of the living being. Hence, he argues, the theory of natural right posits the juridical order as the reproduction of the norm produced by the biological in its perpetual transformation. Where this "attempt to vitalize the norm" is pursued the most fully, after Spinoza, he argues, is in the work of Georges Canguilhem (Esposito 2008, 188), whose work he reads as directly confronting the reduction of all life to its bare material existence under the Nazi regime. That is, on Esposito's reading, Canguilhem's attempt to produce a philosophy of life—rather than a "programmatic antiphilosophical biology"—re-situates the subjectivity and internal variance of life at the heart of the biological, and from there, to the legislative and juridical (Esposito 2008, 188). Canguilhem's essays on the normal and the pathological (1991) are of central importance; in them, Esposito finds that "Canguilhem ascribes to the norm the meaning of the pure mode or state of being," a meaning that includes states of illness as well as health, insofar as each express "a specific situation of life" (Esposito 2008, 189). For Canguilhem, the norm is immanent to the living being: he writes, "to say that 'no doctor proposes to produce a new kind of man, with a new arrangement of eyes or limbs,' is to recognize that an organism's norm of life is furnished by the organism itself, contained in its existence" (1991, 258). Hence for Esposito, Canguilhem establishes the vital norm as coinciding absolutely with the living being itself—and in this regard there can be no *normalisation* of the living being, since what is "normal" is expressed by any given organism's state of being. The promise of this thought, Esposito writes, is that "rather than circumscribing life within the limits of the norm," it "opens the norm to the infinite unpredictability of life" (Esposito 2008, 190).

Insofar as this third reversal responds to—in part by further complicating—the problematic raised by Deutscher of the potentially catastrophic effects of exposure to transformation and difference, it resolutely affirms *all* forms of life, inscribing them equally within the horizon of *bíos*. Esposito's extension, in both *Bíos* and *Immunitas*, of Canguilhem's discourse on abnormality, disease, and risk, is where this problematisation of the question is most evident. Canguilhem is careful to remind his readers that the norm is

not precisely the same thing as the appearance of an *individual* organism, taken alone. This means that, for Canguilhem, an individual organism's state of disease cannot *itself* represent a norm, but at most serves to define the norm by way of its deviation. On Esposito's reading, then:

> The healthy organism is measured by its capacity and willingness to experience the unexpected, with all the risks this entails, including the extreme risk of a catastrophic reaction. One might say that for the organism, disease represents the risk of not being able to take risks: not a lack, but an excess of preservation. (Esposito 2011, 143)

This has major consequences for Esposito; firstly, that "the norm for any organism… is the ability to change its own norms" (Esposito 2011, 143); secondly, that catastrophic reactions—including death—are phenomena of *life itself* (Esposito 2008, 190); and finally, that the organism's ability to experience—i.e., assimilate or recover from—the arrival of the unexpected "is a measure of the vital force of existence" (Esposito 2011, 143).

The power that Esposito attributes to life, therefore, is indeed distinct from immunitary protection—instead of defending against alterity, "life" transforms itself—but by the same token, it also appears to diminish the risk of destruction or self-destruction necessarily implied in exposure and self-transformation. In one sense, Esposito's acknowledgement of "the extreme risk of a catastrophic reaction" (2011, 143) means that the necessary possibility of the arrival of the catastrophic is not wholly erased; in another, however, it reduces all these potentialities to phenomena of *life* as such, and in this regard as *no longer catastrophic* (for life). Esposito's depiction of life, that is, can be seen to "anticipate the monstrous" as (only) another expression of life's power in all its infinite unpredictability. Moreover, this "vital force of existence" appears not as the living being's capacity to be affected, but rather, as its immanent power to transform *itself* in the face of what threatens it. Any risk, therefore, appears wholly annulled by its reinscription *inside of* life—and in the face of risk, life leverages its power to transform its own norms, deferring death through its perpetual rebirth. Cary Wolfe argues that in this regard Esposito succumbs to "a sort of neovitalism that ends up radically dedifferentiating the field of 'the living' into a molecular wash of singularities that all equally manifest 'life' " (2013, 59). Life, in Esposito's depiction,

is laid bare to nothing other than more life, and in this resolute affirmation, life "itself" appears everywhere unthreatened by disaster. In this sense, then, Esposito's project again, despite his intentions, immunises "life" against the dangers of both immunisation and autoimmunity from the outset, by envisioning a life whose self-identity and integrity—*as life*—remains intact. The sanctity of life *as such*, in its very power to exist, act, and invent new forms, remains untouchable; the arrival of any other is wholly appropriable and assimilable within it. In this sense, Esposito reinstitutes a certain prophylactic tendency, one that might even threaten life with the very catastrophic reactions he seeks to avoid, insofar as it rests, for example, on the highly fragile assumption that "life's power" and its liberated self-expression never manifest themselves into new exclusionary or totalitarian arrangements that nonetheless envision themselves as "custodians" or "producers" of life. Perhaps more crucially, however, insofar as Esposito positions biopolitics' negative, historical form as the unwelcome administration of life from *outside* of it, and its new, affirmative form as emerging wholly from life, we should ask whether there is anything left of politics remaining within this schema. That is, if politics becomes nothing more than the reflection, in a variety of institutional forms, of life's autonomy and autotely, the absolute transformability of life and the assimilability of alterity threatens (or promises) to put an end to negotiation, decision or intervention—those presumably political activities through which we might inherit or invent a future for life on earth.

6 Disclosing the Political

Before and beyond understanding autoimmunity as an essential trait of democracy in particular, can the *general* logic of autoimmunity, as I have reconstructed it, have any political effects? As I have argued in chapter 3, any effects of autoimmunity will not be of the strongly normative kind that Nancy Fraser is looking for when she asks whether deconstruction can have any political implications or significance "beyond the byzantine and incestuous struggles it has provoked in American lit crit departments" (Fraser 1984, 127–28). Through chapters 4 and 5, we have found in the work of Judith Butler and Roberto Esposito, two authors highly attentive to the effects of the logic of autoimmunity in contemporary biopolitics, the resurgence or reinstitution of that same logic. As I have suggested in chapter 4, it is the (non)power that autoimmune vulnerability implies that forces us to look beyond the biopolitical frame as it is commonly thought, which is to say, beyond a thought of politics as only power *over* life. And while Esposito proposes to venture in this direction precisely by countering the reduction of politics to immunitary protection, his project ultimately appears, as I argued in chapter 5, to immunise life against the risks that accompany transformation and exposure to alterity by affirming life's immanent power to transform itself. If, despite his identification of the *problem* of immunisation in modern politics, Esposito's account of an affirmative biopolitics nonetheless reinstitutes a certain, albeit transformed, prophylactic tendency to protect life, what chance remains for a thought of politics that could take autoimmunity into account?

Through the trilogy formed by *Communitas*, *Immunitas*, and *Bíos*, it is difficult to sidestep this reading, or to unearth a potential alternative that would not foreground this

"power or potentiality proper to life itself" (Prozorov 2017, 804) that appears to serve its own, albeit transformed, immunitary function. Philippe Lynes suggests that Esposito's earlier work, particularly *Categories of the Impolitical*—a text published in Italian in 1988, but only translated into English in 2015—offers an alternative to this "potentially dedifferentiating discourse on life" (Lynes 2018, 204). There, Esposito writes that "there is another way of understanding power [*potenza*]: as passion, as suffering, as patience" (Esposito 2015, 121). It is not clear, however, that this redefinition should hold through *Bíos*, in which certain uses would certainly run counter to this association of *potenza* with suffering—for example, it is used for the "deployment of sovereign power [*potenza*] on the part of the American imperial state" (2008, 149). But Esposito's continued remarks in *Categories of the Impolitical* could certainly reorient the closing arguments of *Bíos*: "it is only when it is approached through passivity that potentiality [*potenza*] can attempt to undermine power [*potere*]… thus turning it into its apparent opposite: *impotence* (which is its opposite only from the point of view of activity)" (Esposito 2015, 121). Rather than opposing power and powerlessness, that is, Esposito himself suggests the operation of something like a *nonpower*, thought as capacity or vulnerability, that goes unrecognised in his later works on biopolitics. It is perhaps by pursuing this possibility opened by *Categories of the Impolitical*, by re-placing passivity at the centre of the "innovative power" that Esposito attributes to life, that a thought of politics that does not immunise itself from the outset might begin to be thought.

Where this sense of passivity as a necessary factor in exposure to transformation—and with it, exposure to the worst as a necessary possibility—is especially absent in Esposito's work, I have suggested, is in his use of natality as he inherits it from Hannah Arendt. Esposito's identification of natality, which he puts forward as the "vital layer of life" out of which "the politicity of action" is generated and through which life is exposed to continual transformation, may offer a way forward, even if his account appears to close off that possibility in its resolute affirmation of all life. In this chapter, I turn to Arendt's work and her view of politics, although not, as I hope will be clear by now, as a method of determining normative political positions to be drawn from the logic of autoimmunity. Rather, Arendt's natal action, especially as it is described in *The Human Condition*, enables an alternative approach to thinking the question of politics beyond immunopolitics—albeit precisely for the same reasons that it is faulted for depicting "an aridly self-contained ideal of politics that

excludes basic matters of justice from public concern" (Tsao 2002, 97). That is, the significance of Arendt's view of politics lies in the terms of her *exclusion* of the protection of life (in all its forms) from the political sphere. In stark contrast to, say, Butler's emphasis on the fragility and interdependence of life as the basis for a politics that would safeguard it against harm, or Esposito's affirmation of birth as the "only way for life to defer death" (Esposito 2008, 181), Arendt's collective, natal action *cannot* serve an immunising function. On Arendt's account, a view of politics that takes natality, rather than mortality, as its constitutive condition cannot be marshalled in the service of protecting life.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, it would be hasty to overemphasise a potentially passive (or conditioned) character in Esposito's natality where little evidence would support such a conclusion. But the remarkable *absence* of any such capacity for or vulnerability to suffering, violence, and destruction in his account has been the source of several critiques (e.g. Deutscher 2013; Mills 2018), indicating the possibility of its further transformation. That is, natality, understood as the fact of having been *born*, certainly *could* be taken to indicate, as it does in Butler, a "condition of being conditioned" (Butler 2010, 23), or a primary vulnerability to and dependence on others in order to live. Alternatively, taken as a metaphor for giving *birth*, natality might indicate an impassioned experience of hospitality *to* the other, by which someone or something radically new and unforeseeable arrives (or is *in-ven*ted). Neither of these senses of passivity appear to be at work in Esposito's reconfiguration of the term. Nor, indeed, does any sense either of the passivity of birth or of its biological bareness, including all the risks and exposure to violence entailed in gestation and parturition, appear to be at work in Arendt's account of natal action. Could the task of articulating autoimmunity's political effects, then, be as simple as taking the material facts of birth and its dangers into account? Put differently, is it simply that *Esposito* has not gone far enough in thinking the biological bareness of birth as, he claims, Arendt fails to do? Catherine Mills comes close to this suggestion in her readings of both Arendt and Esposito, writing that for Esposito, "birth becomes a metaphor for the new… birth is not only a perpetual feature of life, but that life is ultimately born of nothing" (Mills 2018, 102), and, following Adriana Cavarero (2014), makes a similar claim regarding Arendt's natality, that "all those born are born of a mother, and, yet, in Arendt, this is never the case for natality understood as a condition of action" (Mills 2018, 78). She argues that Arendt is "at pains to

separate natality from physical birth and the gendering of politics that this perspective might entail," and suggests that recovering "an association between natality and the female body that gives birth" can "offer important insight into the operation of biopolitics today" (Mills 2018, 151–52).

While such an approach may indeed bear promise for thinking through and even resisting the biopolitical regulation of reproduction, particularly in its eugenic and genocidal forms, this association of natal action with birthing—which "never 'produces' anything but life" (Arendt 2018, 88), as is the very *definition* of labour in Arendt—would, on Arendt's terms, appear to be untenable. As Hanna Pitkin writes:

> Explicating the concept of labor, Arendt, unlike any earlier theorist who employs the term, stresses the sense of that word associated with giving birth, an inexorable physiological process, independent of will or intent, usually involving pain and severe effort by the whole body, and "producing" new life. (Pitkin 1998, 166)

In this sense, and against Cavarero's and Mills's claims to the contrary, Arendt is in fact remarkably *attentive* to the specificity of giving birth—at least, in comparison to much of the political philosophy to which she responds—but the fact remains that birth itself is very much *not* a moment of natal action, even if it gives rise to it. This is a lamentable position for some feminist thinkers, to be sure, as Lisa Guenther indicates:

> the opposition between a laborious, private, and feminine labor of reproduction and an active, public, political, and apparently sexually undifferentiated "second birth" conspires to reduce the maternal body to a biological or animal condition for a human existence from which she herself is excluded. (Guenther 2006, 40)

But the very characteristics of giving birth that a moment ago I suggested may hint at the promise of thinking natality in terms of nonpower—thought as, perhaps, an impassioned act of (potentially unwilled) hospitality to the newcomer—are also what set it strongly *apart* from natal action as Arendt understands it. Indeed, as Fanny Söderbäck suggests, natality ceases to function as the central category of the political if it is construed only in terms of biological birth (2018, 277), and this is the case for reasons that exceed those founding

Esposito's (and Guenther's) critique, that is, the association of the event of birth with the animality of the human being.

This is not, of course, to advocate a reading that would see natality and birth completely estranged from one another in Arendt's work, a position that is equally untenable. Indeed, it is on the basis of Arendt's grounding of the political in birth that Esposito is able to develop his own concept of natality, in which he sees a promise for thinking the political potential of biological life, albeit one on which Arendt does not deliver. Esposito is insistent that it is Arendt's "Heideggerian tonality" that prevents her from elaborating this relationship between the natality of action and the life from which it emerges (Esposito 2008, 179), and therefore, ultimately, what inhibits her from adequately countering the extreme politicisation of biological life in totalitarianism. On Esposito's reading, Heidegger, in placing an "absolute distance between man and animal," "risks entrusting *bíos* to nonphilosophy, or better, to that antiphilosophy that was terrifyingly realized in the 1930s in its most direct politicization" (Esposito 2008, 156). The same is true, he claims, in Arendt's thinking of birth: "although birth is innervated in a process—that of conception, gestation, and parturition—that has to do directly with the animality of man, Arendt thinks birth is what distinguishes man most clearly from the animal, what exists from what lives, politics from nature" (Esposito 2008, 179). That is to say that for Esposito, both Arendt and Heidegger's insistence on the separation of, and accordingly the differential value attributed to, political (or qualified, or "human") life and biological (or bare, or "animal") life, as opposed to thinking their "rapport," ultimately fails the two thinkers, and does so because they abandon the work of thinking through the political qualification *of* biological life to totalitarianism (Esposito 2008, 157). But this is not the only way that Arendt's natality can be read. Even in Esposito's reading, Arendt's references to the phenomenon of birth are not quite so straightforwardly separable from the category of qualified life. Indeed, his intervention in Arendt's thought takes place precisely *because* of the apparently contradictory status of birth in *The Human Condition*—as both brute mammalian fact, "radically extraneous to a politics that assumes meaning precisely by freeing itself from the order of necessity," and as that event in which "politics finds the originary impulse of its own innovative power" (Esposito 2008, 177).

As several authors have noted (Birmingham 2006, 17, 23; Vatter 2014, 129; Söderbäck 2018, 274), despite its significance, natality "itself" is never the subject of any sustained analysis in Arendt's own work, and the specific sense of the analogy in her claim that our insertion into the world through speech and action is "*like* a second birth" (Arendt 2018, 176; emphasis mine) remains unclear. On the one hand, passages such as that which closes *The Origins of Totalitarianism* appear to grant natality a kind of ontological permanence by virtue of the fact of birth:

> Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus est*—"that a beginning be made man was created" said Augustine. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man. (Arendt 1973, 479)

Parts of *The Human Condition* hint at the same; action's "impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative"; "because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action" (Arendt 2018, 177). What is born in human birth is a singular individual, and this singularity is not an attribute added on to a form of bare species-life, but rather stands in opposition to the very possibility *of* the human species (Vatter 2014, 150; Collin 1999, 107); action "corresponds to the human condition of plurality" instituted by the birth of singular individuals, the "fact that men, not Man, live on the earth" (Arendt 2018, 7). And yet what is always at stake for Arendt is the possibility of (human) life ceasing to be natal, and thereby ceasing to be human, whether in totalitarianism and the "preparation of living corpses" in the concentration camps (Arendt 1973, 447), in the all-encompassing primacy of work, or in the reduction of the human "to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal" in the work of the behavioural sciences (Arendt 2018, 45). The final section of *The Human Condition*, "The Victory of the *Animal Laborans*," stands as a stark warning in this regard. There, she writes: "It is quite conceivable that the modern age—which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity—may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known" (Arendt 2018, 322). On the one hand, the association of human birth with the condition of natality (by way of "guarantee," no less) suggests that for Arendt the

phenomenon of human birth always exceeds its biological meaning; human birth not only carries a symbolic significance in *standing for* newness, but even in its very facticity serves a greater function than that of mere reproduction, in bringing someone "uniquely new" into the world (Arendt 2018, 178). Yet on the other, reading *The Human Condition* as a historical narrative suggests that human life *could* cease to be natal, which is to say, human birth could become—or may be *already*—nothing more than the reproduction of the species. As Anne O'Byrne writes, "with the victory of *animal laborans* in the modern world, natality seems reduced at last to the merely biological fact of birth… Birth is now a merely mammalian phenomenon that signifies nothing. It does not represent fertility: it *is* the fertility of nature" (O'Byrne 2010, 90–91).

The problematic to be pursued here, then, is less that of the felicity of Arendt's claim that action is "like a second birth"—how much like it? are there placentas involved?—than that of the inauguration of the political: on what basis is political life possible? Under what conditions? and under what conditions can it disappear? If it indeed has its basis in the fact of birth, how far can it be distinguished from what Arendt sees as the automatic circularity of the fertility of natural life, of the life of the "conditioned and behaving animal," and of the labour of assuring survival? If natality is a relevant concept for thinking the repercussions of autoimmunity for politics, it owes this relevance not so much to its apparent provision of a biological foundation for the political, but rather, as we will see, to its inability to determine, in a totalising fashion, politics and its relationship to biological life. As I will suggest, even Arendt's account of politics, characterised by action and made possible by natality, turns out to exceed the restricted definition and place that she assigns to it.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Arendt reconstructs a certain Greek understanding of politics through a delineation of the "three fundamental human activities" of labour, work, and action. Action is the "political activity par excellence," and "has the closest connection with the human condition of natality" (Arendt 2018, 9). Labour, the activities that assure survival (whether individual or species), and work, activities directed toward utility and which "bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time," remain connected to "the most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality" (Arendt 2018,

8). But they are nonetheless independent of the plurality that the human condition of natality institutes, according to Arendt, and "it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men" (2018, 22). Because action "goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter," it is directly dependent on the human condition of plurality, which is to say the ostensible fact that human beings are unique and distinct, in contrast to the reproductive multiplication that constitutes species-life (Arendt 2018, 8). Without such plurality, action "would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behaviour" (Arendt 2018, 8).

Central to this delineation of human activities is the decisive division of Greek life, upon which, she argues, "all ancient political thought rested as self-evident and axiomatic" (Arendt 2018, 28). That division lies between the public and private, "between the sphere of the *polis* and the sphere of the household or the family" (Arendt 2018, 28), and against which modern concepts of "political economy" appear as contradictions in terms (2018, 29). Entry into the political, in this reconstruction, is possible only on the basis of freedom from both necessity and utility, from labor and work. "The realm of the *polis*," she writes, "was the sphere of freedom, and if there was a relationship between these two spheres, it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for freedom of the *polis*" (Arendt 2018, 30–31). The *bios politikos*, she recounts, is "a sort of second life"—outside of and added onto household life—of participation in "the realm of human affairs… from which everything merely necessary or useful is strictly excluded" (Arendt 2018, 24–25). *Polis* life denoted, for Arendt's Greeks, "a very special and freely chosen form of political organization," one concerned with the production of "beautiful deeds," which is to say devoted to action—as opposed to mere tasks "necessary to keep men together in an orderly fashion" (Arendt 2018, 13). On this account, then, even the crafting of laws and governing is not authentically political but pre-political, since it needed to be performed *before* political activity could begin: "before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place" (Arendt 2018, 194). In the same way, ruling through violence or despotism can be understood as an act of utility (or even "necessity") that might permit *becoming* free ("for instance, by ruling over slaves"), but which is not itself chosen in freedom (Arendt 2018, 31, 13). Freedom, for Arendt, is the central category of the political, and although being unrestrained by meeting

life's needs (i.e., "freedom from necessity") is a necessary condition for it, it carries another, positive sense as well: freedom is also "the principle of beginning" (Arendt 2018, 177)—the human capacity to act, which is conditioned not by needs nor by predicted ends, but by the human condition of natality. It is this specific sense of freedom—as a capacity which is "permanent" and which "cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed" (Arendt 2018, 6)—that is the focus of her view of politics, and indeed of power.

At first glance, then, Arendt's case for protecting the realm of politics as the space of action would appear far at odds with the task of considering what autoimmunity, thought as nonpower, might bring to bear on the political. Her reconstruction of the Greek division between the public and private realms, between the *bios politikos* and bare life, makes even Esposito's reconfiguration of natality seem like a radical inversion of her own concept. That is, even if Esposito's reconfiguration of natality winds up reproducing a certain form of immunopolitics because of its singular focus on an unconditional, innovative power proper to life itself, it would nonetheless appear that he *tempers*, rather than exacerbates, Arendt's insistence on action—great deeds, heroism, the stuff biographies are made of—as the only political activity there is, by making politics equally the domain of algae as it is of human affairs. Arendt's identification of politics with action lends itself to a reading that sees political activity as the work of an independent and autonomous agent, necessarily human, to all appearances masculine, unconditioned by—even immune to—any kind of "nonpower," vulnerability, or passivity, indeed any antecedent conditions whatsoever. Such a reading is of course an oversimplification, but even where it may be true that Arendt looks to restrict the meaning of politics to a certain form (and sense) of activity, to defend it from the creeping sterile instrumentality of work or the repetitive and cyclical demands of biological survival, it is also the case that her account of natal action complicates and exceeds this restricted definition.

For Arendt, a political act is one that introduces something new into the world, the consequences of which cannot be calculated in advance, and which might set off wholly new trajectories, create new institutions, or even establish communities (Arendt 2018, 232–33; Honig 1992, 216). The results of action may never be known, because the process that

action sets in motion might never come to an end (Arendt 2018, 233). In a lexicon that is not Arendt's own, action is an *event*, and, like in Derrida's articulation, it might be "so unforeseeable and irruptive that it disturbs even the horizon of the concept or essence on the basis of which we believe we recognize an event *as such*" (Derrida 2003, 90). That is, natal action consists in doing or bringing about the impossible (strictly speaking, Arendt calls it the "infinitely improbable"), always "against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to a certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle" (Arendt 2018, 178). But many readers would likely draw a distinction between the experience of the event as arrival of the *tout autre* in Derrida as articulated here (in chapters 2 and 3) and Arendtian natal action, particularly on the basis of the agency that Arendt appears to champion for her actors, in contrast to the nonpower or vulnerability that institutes openness to the other in this account of autoimmunity. But the temporality that Arendt attributes to natality comes to complicate this distinction. The capacity to act, she claims, is instituted by the condition of natality; action is the repetition of the beginning that came into the world with our (first) birth:

> With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labor, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to enjoy, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. (Arendt 2018, 176–77)

The characterisation of action as being "like" birth has instigated disagreement among commentators, as I have outlined already. For some, like Cavarero (2014, 2016), Mills (2018), and Guenther (2006), it indicates a certain failing on Arendt's part to think fully the implications *of* birth, and in doing so limits the possibilities of what can properly count as a political act. For Guenther it champions a sovereign agency, necessarily in the masculine, to the exclusion of the "contribution that women's reproductive labor makes to political life":

> having been first initiated into the natural world through the body of a labouring woman, Arendt's political actor initiates *himself* into the fully human world, as if to "confirm and take upon" himself the "naked fact" of his prior birth to a mother by giving himself a "second birth." (Guenther 2006, 40)

But for Peg Birmingham, it indicates a wavering in Arendt's discourse on natality: that the *first* event of natality, ostensibly the embodied moment of birth, despite its presentation here as one of "naked physical appearance," is never entirely so naked or physical (Birmingham 2006, 23), and moreover, nor is it strictly first. The temporal structure that Arendt appears to attribute to action turns out to disturb what Birmingham considers the "easy" but mistaken move of seeing "second birth" as "a kind of heroic individuality" (Birmingham 2006, 24). Birmingham argues that the embodied and symbolic, or linguistic, dimensions of the event of natality are inseparable (Birmingham 2006, 23–24). She recalls Arendt's references to what she calls the rectilinear temporality of human life, understood against the cyclical temporality of species life (Birmingham 2006, 25):

> Men are "the mortals," the only mortal things in existence, because unlike animals they do not exist only as members of a species whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation. The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movement of biological life. (Arendt 2018, 18–19)

For Birmingham, such assertions show that Arendt's birth is never reducible to biological reproduction, because "the event of natality… is also the event of mortality" (Birmingham 2006, 25). This does not constitute a claim about human nature: rather, as Arendt confirms,

> the birth and death of human beings are not simple natural occurrences, but are related to a world into which single individuals, unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable entities, appear and from which they depart. Birth and death presuppose a world which is not in constant movement, but whose durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible. (Arendt 2018, 96–97)

In this regard, like the first "yes" of unconditional hospitality (see chapter 3), "first" birth is (always already) given meaning by the necessary possibility of the "second," that is, the newcomer's distinction coming to be revealed in action, and producing a "recognizable life-story from birth to death." In this sense, then, there is no "natural birth" for the human being, only a "first" birth that is doubled from the outset.

But a further, and more comprehensive, indication of the enfolding of the two meanings of natality in the event of birth, Birmingham suggests, lies in the linguistic character of this "second birth," that it takes place through speech (Birmingham 2006, 24–25). She further strengthens this claim by following Arendt's reference to Heidegger (Birmingham 2006, 28–29). While Esposito (and hence also the thesis thus far) makes little of Arendt's insistence on speech as an essential accompaniment to action—it may seem all too human—Arendt is clear that "speechless action would no longer be action," and "many, and even most acts, are performed in the manner of speech" (Arendt 2018, 178). It is "by word and deed" that "we insert ourselves into the world" (176)—not by deed alone. Speech, for Arendt, gives action its relevance and its revelatory quality by disclosing the agent (Arendt 2018, 179–80); in the same way that "action corresponds to the fact of birth," "speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness" (178). Birmingham argues that speech, for Arendt, is "performative… inaugurative and not descriptive," because the "who" that is disclosed in speaking does not predate or predetermine speech, nor is it a consequence of it; rather, "the 'who' is born in the very speaking itself" (Birmingham 2006, 24). The "second" birth, that is, is always already (also) a "first" birth, insofar as it is always inaugurative of the "who" that it announces; for this reason, Birmingham argues that "both births are inseparable and always found together" (2006, 25). As Bonnie Honig also argues, identity is not the "expressive condition or essence of action," but rather its performative product (Honig 1992, 216). Noting that Heidegger's thought "provides at the very least an implicit frame for Arendt's thought of natality," Birmingham argues that freedom (i.e., the freedom to act and speak) consists in the linguistic address, understood not as the imposition of the self (as one might expect of the "speech" that accompanies great deeds) but as welcoming of the other. This address "does not leap in and dominate the other; instead, it is the solicitude that lets the other be 'who' he or she is" (Birmingham 2006, 28). In a surprising reversal of the ("easy but

mistaken") reading of second birth as a *sui generis* moment of self-assertion, Birmingham suggests that the act of being *named*—that is, by another—makes the "naked facticity" of "first" birth "always already the site of language"; that one "comes to be" precisely through this linguistic welcome (2006, 29). One never merely or only arrives in being born, but is welcomed, and in this regard "our naked facticity is always already imbued with linguistic natality" (Birmingham 2006, 31). This reading runs counter to many that would dispense with Arendt's natal politics for its apparent championing of autonomous agents and its exclusion of reproductive labour, insofar as it renders "second" birth inseparable from—even prior to—the "first" and, moreover, makes "freedom" no longer the freedom to *impose* oneself but the freedom, granted by having been first addressed by others, to address (hence likewise to free) others (Birmingham 2006, 29).

But where this superimposition of first and second birth appears to falter, Anne O'Byrne argues, is at "that place where birth's connotations of spontaneity and newness would seem to have been lost" (O'Byrne 2010, 94). Given that what is at stake for Arendt is the possibility of human life *ceasing* to be natal, and if it is, as she writes, "quite conceivable that the modern age… may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known" (Arendt 2018, 322), it would seem that human birth could become—or indeed could be *already*—nothing more than the reproduction of the species, "the birth of a being who is immediately caught up in the cyclical temporality of nature" (O'Byrne 2010, 91). Certainly, not every child who is born is welcomed or named. But more to the point, the apparent permanence of the relation that Birmingham constructs between first and second birth—that "our bodily existence is never simply biological but always already mortal" (2006, 25), that "our naked facticity is always already imbued with linguistic natality" (31)—no longer seems to hold in light of the final sections of *The Human Condition*. O'Byrne summarises Arendt's diagnosis therein:

> The result is a way of being in time that is entirely captured by the cyclical temporality of nature and an understanding of human activity as confined to the endless cycle of labor and consumption. Creativity is now no more than fertility. Immortality can be imagined only for the species… Where is there any scope now for the spontaneity associated with natality that "always somehow" makes newness and change possible? (O'Byrne 2010, 98–99).

If, as Arendt suggests, it is as though in the modern age "even the last trace of action in what men were doing… had disappeared," and "what was left was a 'natural force,' the force of the life process itself" (Arendt 2018, 321), then all that remains is "first" birth, which appears as nothing more than the reproduction of the species.

O'Byrne's answer to the problem presented by Birmingham's superimposition of first and second birth and Arendt's insistence on the possibility of a world without action is "syncopated temporality," the temporal structure of both natal action and birth. It is this construal of natality that indicates not only action's distance from "heroic individuality" as Birmingham also aims to underscore, but also its fragility, dependency, and even, perhaps, its passivity. Put simply, syncopated temporality refers to the fact that both action and birth, as new beginnings, only turn out *later* to have been the beginning of what they set in motion. As O'Byrne writes, action "turns out to be belated in such a way that it holds open the gap between event and meaning. Action awaits its meaning in the same way that… birth only later comes to be my birth" (O'Byrne 2010, 100). Action's meaning, Arendt writes, "never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian" (Arendt 2018, 233). Just as one's birth only turns out to be one's own by chance and in retrospect, the beginning that takes place in action, and the beginner who is inaugurated there, are fragile, contingent, and temporary—i.e., open to further transformation—far from being "guaranteed." For Arendt, what is "guaranteed" in birth is only the *capacity* to begin, and the effects of any beginning remain to come. In this regard, then, what is ostensibly "first" birth again becomes an effect of the "second"; in the first instance, as in Birmingham's argument, from deriving its meaning from the necessary possibility of a second birth, and in the second instance, as in O'Byrne's development, deriving its (belated) meaning from its being the "first" birth of the "who" inaugurated, for the first time, in the second.

In other words, any autonomous agents to be found in this account of action are mere *effects* of action, rather than its causative agents. And they remain open to reinstitution and transformation—which is to say, equally vulnerable to the effects of action. Like birth, "the disclosure of the 'who' through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action… start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the

newcomer" (Arendt 2018, 184). And, as Arendt emphasises repeatedly, action's "full appearance," which is to say, its chance of "becoming historical" is only possible in the public realm, with the constant presence of others (Arendt 2018, 180). It is this insistence on the necessary publicity of action that lends itself, particularly in her depiction of the *polis*, to a reading that sees political action as "an aridly self-contained ideal… that excludes basic matters of justice from public concern" (Tsao 2002, 97), consisting primarily in competition for immortal fame, available only to a select few, and with no real benefits. Hanna Pitkin, for example, puts two questions to Arendt of the citizens in the *polis*: "What keeps these citizens together as a body? And what is it they talk about together, in that endless palaver in the *agora*?" (Pitkin 1981, 336). She responds on Arendt's behalf: "Evidently what holds these competitive citizens together is that each needs the others for his audience, as means to his personal end" (Pitkin 1981, 336), citing Arendt's claims that the Greek *polis* was "supposed to multiply the occasions to win 'immortal fame,' " and "offer a remedy for the futility of action and speech" (Arendt 2018, 197; Pitkin 1981, 336–37). Certainly, Arendt repeatedly returns to the figure of the storyteller or historian, from whose perspective the meaning of an action can be determined. But to understand the significance Arendt attributes to the publicity of action, and what is at stake for her in the apparent dissolution of the boundaries between public and private, the emphasis here needs to be shifted, from the "immortal fame" sought by the Arendt's Greeks to the (even more archaic, in her view) role of others—not just to recount any one act, but to inherit it and bear it forward as "co-actors" (2018, 189).

Far from the unquestioning admiration often attributed to Arendt's view of the Greek story she recounts, Arendt in fact consistently and systematically places a distance between the ancient Greek beliefs about politics and action and her own, as Roy Tsao argues (2002). It is true, as Pitkin notes (1981, 336), that the Greek view of public action that Arendt recounts is "highly individualistic"—in fact, these are *Arendt's* words (Arendt 2018, 194)—and surely it is not out of the question to suggest, as Pitkin does, that the Greek citizens that Arendt depicts

> begin to resemble posturing little boys clamoring for attention ("look at me! I'm the greatest!" "No, look at *me*!") and wanting to be reassured that they are brave, valuable, even real. (Pitkin 1981, 338)

But to attribute this to Arendt, rather than the Greek experience that she recounts, misses both the ways in which Arendt looks to depart from this view of political action and what in it she is advocating for. These are not "Arendt's citizens" (Pitkin 1981, 336), and this is not "her concept of public action" (338), although it is certainly central to the development *of* her concept of public action. Where this is especially clear is in her depiction of action as originally interdependent—even for the Greeks—one crucial facet in the experience of public action that she invokes in the hope of its reinstantiation. As Tsao argues, Arendt's discussion of the Greek *polis* is split across two chapters of *The Human Condition*; in "The Public and the Private Realm," and "Action," and while the first of the two serves quite clearly to conscript a certain set of Greek ideas to elucidate her own, "the point of the second discussion is precisely to draw attention to beliefs of the Greeks that she cannot herself endorse" (Tsao 2002, 99). "Action," far from straightforwardly promoting the restoration in the present of the Greek experience, tells a different story: that of the quasi-originary characteristics of action, including its limits and its risks, and the ways in which the Greeks tried—and failed—to guard against them. That is, it tells the story of *where they went wrong*.

One of the ways in which the ancient Greeks went astray, Arendt claims, citing Pericles's Funeral Oration, was in their ambition to attain "everlasting remembrance" "without assistance from others" (Arendt 2018, 197). Indeed, this was one "solution" to what Arendt calls the "predicament of unpredictability"; the Greeks sought to control action by stressing "the urge toward self-disclosure at the expense of all other factors" (Arendt 2018, 194). The idea of a hero who, with one supreme act, could "deliver into the narrator's hand the full significance of his deed, so that it is as though he had not merely enacted the story of his life but at the same time also 'made' it," was, she claims, the prototype for action in the Greek world and a (failed) assurance against the risks of entrusting an act—and its continuation and its consequences—to others (Arendt 2018, 193–94). Indeed, this appears to be precisely the image that Guenther conjures of the "political actor [who] initiates *himself* into the fully human world, as if to 'confirm and take upon' himself the 'naked fact' of his prior birth to a mother by giving himself a 'second birth' " (Guenther 2006, 40). But Arendt stresses that action (like one's own birth) cannot be performed alone, nor can we reliably control its effects by attempting to do so. Indeed, action's unpredictability—and power—

emerges from plurality as a necessary effect of natality. Action's consequences are "boundless," because it acts "into a medium"—the web of human relationships—"where every reaction becomes a chain reaction" (Arendt 2018, 190). Put differently, action consists not only in a beginning, but, as O'Byrne (2010, 100) argues, "in two parts: the initiative undertaken by an individual, and then the activity of others who bear it on into the world. Or not." Action, in other words, insofar as it is a beginning, consists in giving what is started over to others to inherit how they will—and what is given over even includes the self instituted (or "born") in that beginning. More of a risk for the Greeks than that of the hero's death—which served in in their prototype of action not as a danger but as an *assurance* against this very uncertainty—action's interdependence always risks, on the one hand, the catastrophic consequences that might come with giving over some new innovation to others (say, Arendt's choice example of splitting the atom), and on the other, that action fizzling out or being stymied by the actions of others. And this risk is infinitely multiplied by acting into a world "where everybody has the same capacity to act," a world of others, therefore, "who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow" (Arendt 2018, 244). In this regard, then, action, along with self-disclosure, lies not in the strength of any one actor nor even in the exercise of sovereignty—which, she says anyway, "is possible only in imagination, paid for by the price of reality" (Arendt 2018, 235)—but in the condition of being given over to and at the mercy of others. Of course, for Arendt, this condition is both the chance and threat of action, since without such a vulnerability or a capacity to be affected, one would simply see an action through to its end, and in doing so, do away with the "miraculous" character of action entirely. Put differently, this vulnerablity is any action's—and any actor's—chance of survival, in the sense of *survivance*, which takes place only through the testamentary structure of inheritance that necessarily carries with it the risks of self-destruction and transformation. Such a survival is by definition anything but sovereign, even if by virtue of its function as "second birth" it keeps alive, by instituting, the fantasy of the acting self.

Even the freedom that Arendt looks to save does not remain unscathed by the effects of natality. That is, it is undercut, even condemned, by the twin burdens that the capacity for action bears with it: irreversibility and unpredictability. The actor, she suggests, "appears much more the victim and the sufferer than the doer of what he has done" (Arendt 2018,

234) because that actor may be held responsible for the act's consequences. Because its effects are permanent and cannot be undone, but at the same time can never be known in advance, their unpredictability only multiplied by virtue of being acted into a world of other actors, action can seem altogether more like a threat than something to be saved. "Nowhere," she writes, "neither in labor, subject to the necessity of life, nor in fabrication, dependent upon given material, does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom," since at the moment that freedom is put into practice it seems to disappear, and the actor becomes *subject* to whatever processes and effects they may have set out into the world—and worse, even held responsible for them. Plurality, as an effect of natality, is in this way both the condition of political freedom and its essential "*weakness*" (Arendt 2018, 234). In a very literal sense—although perhaps not one that Arendt had intended—speech and action function as *dis-closure*, opening us up to the obligations of others. In doing so, they always permit the possibility that we may be held hostage by our actions, or indeed the actions of others. As Arendt writes:

> Man's inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they doing, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all. (Arendt 2018, 244)

If this reading of action in terms of its temporal structure helps to clarify the fundamental non-sovereignty of Arendt's political actors, it can also guide interpretation of the function of Arendt's description of the *polis* in (and as) "The Greek Solution." There, she writes:

> Men's life together in the form of the *polis* seemed to assure that the most futile of human activities, and the least tangible and most ephemeral of man-made "products," the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable. The organization of the *polis*, physically secured by the walls around the city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws—lest the succeeding generation

> change its identity beyond recognition—is a kind of organized remembrance. (Arendt 2018, 197–98)

In this light, Arendt's scepticism of the *polis* is clearer: it *seemed to assure* such imperishability, by enclosing it within a domain that would guarantee a space for the production of great deeds and immunise that space against the effects of (further) acts that might lead to its transformation or disappearance. But as a "solution" for the unpredictability, ephemerality, and fragility of action, it instead functions as an *anti*-political gesture that "closes the spaces of politics" by "diminishing its possibilities of refounding and augumentation" (Honig 1992, 217). That is, the foundation of the *polis* aimed to assure the immortality of the Greeks' own actions, to give boundaries to action's boundlessness, to put an end to the unpredictable processes that action sets in motion and which might always jeopardise its greatness or its doer's glory—in other words, its foundation functioned, perversely, to *renounce the capacity for action*. Hence Arendt in fact distinguishes quite clearly between the Greeks' "self-interpretation" of the *polis* as city-state and what she calls, only a little later, "the *polis*, properly speaking" (2002, 198), which comes with no such assurances of immortal fame. *That* polis, she writes,

> is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be… It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly. (Arendt 2018, 198–99)

The *polis* thus understood as "the space of appearance" finds "its proper location almost any time and anywhere" (Arendt 2018, 198); far from "organising" and "assuring" action (as the city-state was seen to do), its significance lies instead in its depiction of "a space of political possibility" (Briggs 2021, 101), one that is "potentially there" wherever people gather together, "but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (Arendt 2018, 199).

The ever-present threat to politics that Arendt identifies at work everywhere, that of its enclosure, turns out to be the very reason for the inadmissibility of the body to the public

realm, along with everything that goes with it—say, questions of public health, birth-giving, or gender. As Bonnie Honig puts it, "the body is a univocal instance of complete closure"; for Arendt it is "a master signifier of necessity, irresistibility, imitability, and the determination of pure process" (Honig 1992, 217). It is for *this* reason that Arendt refuses both the possibility of the politicisation of the private realm, and the entrance into the public realm of those things she considers to belong to the private. What Arendt is looking to preserve (without preserving) is action as inventivity, resistibility, and openness to the unexpected—and the necessity that pertains in "life" as such, on the other hand, is automatic, and worse, "*irresistible*—i.e., of an overwhelming urgency" (Arendt 1990, 59). To permit the entrance of the body's irresistible needs into the public sphere only *forecloses* the possibilities of politics:

> It was under the rule of this necessity that the multitude rushed to the assistance of the French Revolution, inspired it, drove it onward, and eventually sent it to its doom, for this was the multitude of the poor. When they appeared on the scene of politics, necessity appeared with them, and the result was that the power of the old regime became impotent and the new republic was stillborn; freedom had to be surrendered to necessity, to the urgency of the life process itself. (Arendt 1990, 60)

In Hanna Pitkin's reading, at least at first, "it seems that for Arendt… it is best for the poor and the laborers to be kept out of the public sphere. Like women, they belong in the household, with the concerns of the body" (Pitkin 1981, 335). Indeed, Arendt's retrieval of the *vita activa*, in reconstructing three "fundamental" human *activities*, seems to reconstruct with it three categories of human *beings*. But Arendt's point is twofold; firstly, that politics cannot take place until the violent and pressing demands of the body are met, and secondly, that politics as she understands it cannot be a means to produce economic solutions. In the first instance, we are incapable of acting because we are not free to do so; in the second, if we mistake utilitarian administration for politics, we risk putting an end to public life altogether. That is, it is true that for Arendt, when we are in a position of deprivation in which our material needs go unmet, we cannot engage in the public sphere. But Arendt's point is not to exclude particular classes of people from public sphere (even if it also serves to do so); it is, as Pitkin comes to conclude, to exclude certain ways of *thinking*, certain approaches or outlooks to politics (1981, 340)—as Arendt so clearly states in the prologue to *The Human Condition*,

her proposition is "nothing more than to think what we are doing" (Arendt 2018, 5). As Pitkin writes:

> Perhaps, then, it is not a particular subject-matter, nor a particular class of people, but a particular attitude against which the public realm must be guarded… Perhaps a "labourer" is to be identified not by his manner of producing nor by his poverty but by his "process"-oriented outlook; perhaps he is "driven by necessity" not objectively, but because he *regards* himself as driven, incapable of action. (Pitkin 1981, 342)

It is this view, rather than the related "animal question," that poses the biggest challenge to the conscription of Arendtian action into an affirmative biopolitics such as Esposito's, even while it indicates a possibility for politicising—by denaturalising—the category of labour. The biopolitical administration of life, even Esposito's version (and indeed Butler's call for a politics to secure precarious lives, too) would be for Arendt, at best, a symptom of the colonisation of the political by a labouring mentality. And, importantly, this mentality would not set off new trajectories for politics and collective life—as they would both have it—but instead close off any such possibilities.

But, as Bonnie Honig points out, Arendt's determination to protect the public/private divide is not only an attempt to secure the political against the intrusion of labour (Honig 1992, 223). It is also, and equally, that is, an attempt to secure the realm of the private from the dangers of the political. It is not the private as such that Arendt holds in contempt (unlike the Greeks)—it is the *social*, that is, that "form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance" (Arendt 2018, 46). What appears in Arendt to be the "disappearance" of the political is also, as Nancy Fraser argues, its "domination… the confounding of the political with other instances, such as the socio-economic, the technological, the cultural and the psychological" (Fraser 1984, 144). As Fraser puts it: "when everything is political, the sense and specificity of the political recedes" (Fraser 1984, 136). Honig argues that for this reason "it is equally important to Arendt to protect the private realm's reliability, univocality, and ordinariness from the disruptions of action and politics" (Honig 1992, 233). That is, the private realm offers some retreat from risk-taking, and from the dangers of action; even if the public realm is the place

of "reality" (Arendt 2018, 58), Arendt claims that "man cannot live in it all the time" (Arendt 2018, 199). The "social," for Arendt, does not only jeopardise the public realm by neutralising the possibilities for action; it "deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world" (Arendt 2018, 59). Indeed, this is another point in her text in which she signals her departure from the Greeks, who, she argues, "sacrificed the private to the public" (Arendt 2018, 59); in contrast to that view, she sees the distinct coexistence of the two spheres as nonnegotiable.

And yet, as her own account of politics has it, action has a habit of happening *to us*, in ways we may neither expect nor want. That is, it is precisely *because* of the boundlessness of action, its spontaneity, its unpredictability—in all, the fact that it exceeds our control—that Arendt looks to give it a proper place and prevent it from overrunning *all* aspects of life, lest even survival be subject to such contingency. Hence Arendt insists on securing, again and again, the public/private distinction through a variety of different divisions that each *should* serve to back it up—like activity and passivity, power and violence, and so on—but which like action, never really stay in their place (Honig 1992, 222). On Arendt's account (and not against it), the border between the two realms is highly fragile, even if it is that "on which all ancient political thought rested as self-evident and axiomatic" (Arendt 1998, 28). What is at stake, ultimately, in their all-too-frequent cross-contaminations, as Honig argues, is "the loss of action itself," and even "the loss of a realm in which the actionable is vouchsafed" (Honig 1992, 223); Arendt writes that "it is only by respecting its own borders" that the public realm, "where we are free to act and to change, can remain intact" (1961, 263–64). But, like the Greeks, whose "solution" for natality's unpredictable, indeed autoimmune, effects in time was the construction of laws and walls and which in fact amounted to the renunciation of the capacity for action, the public/private divide that Arendt looks to build up serves only to immunise action against the chances that it might, after all, *arrive*. As Honig writes, "the impulse to secure, foundationally, the division between the political and the non-political is articulated as a concern for the preservation of the political but is in fact an antipolitical impulse" (Honig 1992, 225). There is nothing that poses a greater threat to action, for Arendt, than its securitisation. Honig suggests, therefore, that we may be better served in reading Arendt to consider the division between the public and the private as a "performative product" rather than a constative declaration, one that is open to contestation and

amendment, "hard won and always temporary" (Honig 1992, 225). To be sure, such a reading is inventive, even if it is grounded in Arendt's construction of action, her valorisation of performative, founding acts and agonistic struggle, and her fears of a wholly rationalised, rule-governed and circumscribed future. But it is also, perhaps, the only way to admit the distinction at all without lapsing into an effective *formalisation* or even *domestication* of action.

Honig's suggestion that we see Arendt's insistence on the distinction of the public and private as necessarily performative and open to refounding is not made as a claim for the automatic or inherent politicality of "private," bare, biological life. Rather, it indicates that nothing is necessarily or *a priori* secured against the chance of politicisation (Honig 1992, 225). The terms of Arendt's exclusion of biological life—that is, its apparent immutability and irresistibility—serve also as the terms by which its *capacity* or *potential* for politicisation cannot be excluded. Natality, as the condition of action, opens up this capacity for politicisation, but not by its apparent grounding of the political *in* biological life—far from it. Instead, and *despite* Arendt's attempts to make action and the political realm safe, natality names the autoimmune tendency affecting the political as she describes it, opening it up to contamination and destruction but also to other possibilities for a form and sense of politics that remain to be invented. Having seen that Arendt's account demonstrates a certain non-sovereign passivity and even automaticity at work in action, that account might also be seen to demonstrate what is "active"—understood this time not as what is "agential" but perhaps as indicating an "active bent," a *weakness* or proclivity for action—in the "passive," labouring aspects of life. That is, it might make "politics," or at least "politicisation" (which is to say "the miracle that saves the world") available *wherever* moments of natality or invention come to surprise and interrupt us—even in the private realm (as Honig shows), even in the so-called "natural" world of non-human life (see Briggs 2021), or even, perhaps, in the apparently sterile and stultifying age of the *animal laborans*.

Conclusion

It would not be fair to claim that there is a political treatise like Arendt's lurking in Derrida's texts on autoimmunity, simply waiting to be discovered. Nor would it be correct to claim that Arendt anticipates Derrida's development of the concept—particularly given just how many of Arendt's assertions must be left notwithstanding in order to develop the reading I have pursued here. No doubt Derrida is more influenced by Arendt than he directly acknowledges, but the point is, again, not to excavate a genealogy of his thought of autoimmunity. Rather, all I hope to have done here is to attend to what *could* be called—and indeed what I am, finally and with no further hesitation calling—the political effects of the general logic of autoimmunity. If autoimmunity in fact "intervenes," politically speaking, it is (only) to open up the possibilities for what might come to count as political—and, of course, in doing so, to endanger the "proper" of politics.

This speaks directly to the problem of the proper context of "autoimmunity in Derrida" that has served as the impetus for all of the preceding discussion, which is to say, the problem of reading autoimmunity as *either* an essential and suicidal trait of democracy, community, and the political, or, alternatively, as a keystone for interpreting deconstruction as a philosophy *of life*, "on the track of life" (Vitale 2018, 1) and proceeding "from an unconditional affirmation of life" (Derrida 2007a, 52). Despite claims such as Erin Obodiac's, that what is only being belatedly named biodeconstruction includes earlier and extensive writings on, among other things, deconstruction and biopolitics (Obodiac 2018, n.p.), the question of politics, and the political import of "doing" biodeconstruction—is

often framed as external to the work of biodeconstruction. In some cases this is made explicit: Sorelle Henricus, for instance, suggests in a note that

> The Foucauldian notions of biopower and biopolitics are tangential to what we might characterize as the thematic of "biodeconstruction," which is more directly concerned with the implications of the fundamental tenets of deconstruction for the discursive practice of producing an understanding of the processes of nature as it emerges on the front of modern "biology." (Henricus 2019, 168n1)

In this way, Henricus suggests that questions of power and institution that could be seen to pertain in the practices of modern biology fall squarely outside the ambit of biodeconstruction, which instead is taken to be limited to interrogating the metaphysics of presence at work in those practices. Vitale, however, suggests the necessity of an encounter—albeit one characterised as debate—between biopolitics and biodeconstruction, one that would be "full of repercussions on both sides, in particular, apropos of its possible declinations within a political horizon" (Vitale 234n36). Although I have not sought to stage a debate as such between biopolitics and biodeconstruction (this seems to me something of a category error), I have nonetheless tried to follow Vitale's provocation as faithfully as possible, which is to say, to begin from the claim, first, that life is no mere issue in deconstruction but rather its very matrix (2018, 1), and, further, that

> beyond the multiple thematic contexts in which the autoimmunitarian lexicon intervenes, the latter is adopted to describe a structural and biological condition of the constitution of the living self, and thus the effects of this condition are propagated beyond the living self throughout the processes of the identitarian constitution elaborated by the living self on a level that is no longer "natural" but "cultural." (Vitale 2018, 170–71)

Beginning from this perspective, I have attempted, taking Derrida's "autoimmunitarian lexicon" as of particular significance to the question, to ask whether treating deconstruction as an investigation of life can be shown to have any political consequences—and, on the way, to ask whether it can be shown to make any *particular* politics possible or indeed preferable.

For this reason, chapter 1's reading of Derrida's autoimmunity in relation to the biological sciences followed a different track from the one breached by Vitale when he orients his interpretation of autoimmunity around the biological concept of cellular apoptosis. Rather than reviewing recent research in immunology in order to determine whether Derrida may turn out to "have been right" about autoimmunity, that is, I explored Derrida's suggestion that a general logic of autoimmunisation can be extended to "life *in general*" beyond the limits of "so-called natural life or life pure and simple" or the "purely 'zoological,' 'biological,' or 'genetic' " (Derrida 2003, 187n7). This recognition of autoimmunity as a general logic suggests that the life that autoimmunity affects is not so easily assimilable to organic life as it is determined by the biological sciences, and further cautions us against "reading [Derrida's] work in a way that folds it into… the discourse of organicist totalisation," as Eszter Timár puts it (Timár 2017, 66). Attention to Derrida's reference to immunosuppression in his account of autoimmunity as a general logic shows that autoimmunity refers to a double movement at work in any *autos* (otherwise) understood to be proper to itself. Reading this logic, as constructed through Derrida's remarks on democracy, sovereignty, and community, in the frame of the living, as Derrida suggests, shows that a general logic of autoimmunity renders life always-already collective and improper to itself, constituted through its exposure to so many outsides.

Having shown that autoimmunity renders any "singular" life always "closed open," vulnerable to and constituted by alterity, the second chapter asked what consequences autoimmunity might bear for collective life so understood, beginning by exploring the worst of these possible consequences. If autoimmunity is not merely a form of suicidality or the result of an uncontrollable immunitary intensification, but rather consists in a radical and constitutive exposure that no immunisation can protect against, it bears an even greater risk than suicide, which is to say, the risk of "rob[bing] suicide itself of its meaning and supposed integrity" (Derrida 2005c, 45). As such, I asked what place there was in this account of autoimmunity for any possibility, let alone promise, of survival. By following the possibility of remainderless self-destruction as "the hypothesis of autoimmunity *in extremis*," as Elina Staikou suggests (2018, n.p.), the chapter clarified, drawing on the work of Samir Haddad (2013), that "the worst," as an event that always remains to be invented, fails to operate as a comparative term, raising the question, pursued in later chapters, of whether autoimmunity

can have any normative consequences. Further, I argued that the life that autoimmunity makes possible is what Derrida calls, in different texts, *survivance* or life death, a conception of life that is not limited to biological survival but is structured by inheritance, including institutional forms of memory and memorialization. This thought of survival is therefore necessarily not the work of the "self" that survives, but rather what takes place when life is at the disposal of others.

The third chapter thus turned to the critical questions posed by Nancy Fraser as early as 1984, when *Specters of Marx* was but an indefinitely deferred promise; whether deconstruction could have any political implications, whether deconstruction harboured *a* politics, and whether such a politics—should it be shown to exist—would even be tenable or desirable (Fraser 1984, 127–28). The logic of autoimmunity, and the survival without sovereignty that it enables, make it difficult to determine any normative claims regarding committed action, decision, or responsibility. But given that autoimmunity appears to nonetheless imply an affirmation of alterity as necessary, if only for the sake of survival, and that this affirmation of alterity has historically served as the locus of intensive debate around the possibility of deconstruction's normative force, both ethical and political, revisiting this debate in light of a general autoimmunity of life seems not only possible but necessary. Thus reconsidering influential accounts of deconstruction's normativity (or lack thereof), as indicated (or not) by the affirmation of alterity, I have argued that while autoimmunity cannot provide us with an ethical or political ground, it nonetheless reveals a weak normative force at work in deconstruction in the form of a non-binding imperative to affirm and maintain the aporetic promise of what remains to come. By rendering us vulnerable to obligation—the *munus* at the root of community, immunity, and autoimmunity—autoimmunity institutes responsibility without any assurances, such that its affirmation can be reduced neither to an affirmation of simple passivity nor the abdication of political responsibility.

With the generalisation of Derrida's logic of autoimmunity having been shown "incapable" of grounding or otherwise guaranteeing a set of normative political principles, values or prescriptions, the attempt to understand the political effects of autoimmunity inevitably transforms from an interpretation of the political significance of Derrida's specific

formulation of the logic of autoimmunity to an investigation of that logic's effects as they appear within and through contemporary attempts to understand the relations between politics and life, which is to say, as they appear within and through contemporary theorisations of biopolitics. In chapters 4 and 5, in looking to the work of Judith Butler and Roberto Esposito, two authors highly attentive to the effects of the logic of autoimmunity in contemporary biopolitics, we have found the resurgence or reinstitution of that same logic. Butler's work, particularly in *Precarious Life* (2006) and *Frames of War* (2010), acknowledges both the potential force of vulnerability and its potential mutations and inversions, and proposes to establish this (non)power of vulnerability as the basis of a politics that takes life as its object. But Butler's insistence on the significance of the "human" and the role played by "deconstitution" and "dehumanization" in her work reveals a broader limitation at work in the biopolitical frame. That is, Butler's approach inevitably reduces the effects of the recognition of vulnerability to "securing equality" and the demands of vulnerability to immunitary protection; our responsibility toward lives recognized as vulnerable is thus defined in advance, and all that remains to be done is to recognize such lives as vulnerable and in need of protection. Butler's difficulty in determining who or what counts as a precarious life reveals, therefore, not only the problem of redrawing the line at which the human is determined—a line that can be infinitely redrawn to exclude certain human lives—but, moreover, the force of the biopolitical frame in limiting our conception of power to power *over* life, which is to say, to immunitary protection. But the potential force of vulnerability as a kind of nonpower, as Robert Briggs (2019, 2021) suggests, renders it not merely a condition of passivity or incapacitation but instead or in addition as the very condition of action. That Butler's work both recognises this potential within vulnerability and nonetheless falls back on a conception of biopolitical justice limited to the preservation of life and the protection of the vulnerable speaks to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of avoiding the force of the biopolitical frame. But if autoimmunity is thought as the condition of the arrival or invention of the other, it can also be thought as what animates the reinvention of the life that "counts," biopolitically speaking. In this way, it signals the possibility of reframing the terms of political community, and the necessity of rethinking the power and the effects of the biopolitical frame.

For this reason, in chapter 5, I turned to the work of Roberto Esposito, who, in the trilogy formed by *Communitas* (2010a), *Immunitas* (2011), and *Bíos* (2008), attempts to turn up within biopolitics a possibility that is largely unthought within the tradition: that biopolitics may harbour within itself—in the additional sense of constraining, to be sure—some possibility, some chance of being *other* than immunopolitics, the subjection of life to forces of protection or negation, optimisation or denudation. And yet, as I argued, Esposito's account of an affirmative biopolitics, despite its identification of the problem of immunisation in modern politics, reinstitutes a certain, albeit transformed, prophylactic tendency to protect life, in its resolute affirmation of the power of life to defer death through perpetual rebirth. That is, despite pursuing the question of a politics of life that is not reducible to immunitary protection and instead is characterised by infinite exposure to alterity, Esposito annuls any risk potentially associated with this exposure insofar as any potential for catastrophe is rendered nothing more than a phenomenon of life itself. In this way, life "itself" is immunised against the dangers of immunisation and autoimmunity—and, perhaps, of politics—from the outset. Nonetheless, there are certain aspects of his account that remain available for reconsideration in light of his suggestion that power (*potenza*) also be understood as "passion, as suffering, as patience" (Esposito 2015, 121), suggesting the possibility of a passive or conditioned character to the political power that he looks to affirm. Where this bears most significance is in his reference to Arendt, and in the difficulties that arise in distinguishing birth from natality in both his and Arendt's accounts.

As we have seen, the terms of Arendt's exclusion of biological life, and birth in particular, also serve as the terms by which its *capacity* or *potential* for politicisation cannot be excluded. Natality, as I have suggested, names the autoimmune tendency affecting the political, opening it up to contamination and destruction but also to other possibilities for a form and sense of politics that remain to be invented. That is, the significance of reading natality as a non-synonymous substitute for autoimmunity is twofold; firstly, it articulates (by actualising) the inability to determine, in a totalising fashion, the border between politics proper and biological life, bare life and the *bios politikos*. Secondly, and more to the point, it signals the essential pervertibility of *any* such delimitation of its context, including, say, those delimitations that serve to circumscribe "democracy" as opposed to "politics as such," or the "we" of political community as opposed to its "others." Natality signals, that is, the

possibility of something like a *liveliness*—both in the sense of affirmativity or hope, and a concern with the life of the living being—at work in autoimmunity's "first" proper context, which is to say, autoimmunity understood as the democratic community's death drive. And along with this, of course, it signals the possibility of—indeed, serves as the resource for—politicising autoimmunity's "second" proper context as reconstituted by reading the investigation of *life* as deconstruction's "very matrix" (Vitale 2018, 1). Natality, read for its autoimmune tendencies, problematises, therefore, the division that Vitale draws between interpreting life as an, or the, "*issue*" of deconstruction, versus its "*matrix*"—where natality is involved, there can really be no *maternal* certainty of this sort. The implications of autoimmunity for *life*, that is, cannot ultimately be reduced to a state of "firstness" or "secondness" in relation to its political significance and effects. Rather, autoimmunity names what always exceeds and overruns such a restricted definition, a legitimate heritage, or a proper place, always serving to multiply the possibilities for what kinds of thought and action such contexts might enable.

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