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'Biopower,' a decade ago hardly on any scholar's lips, is today on almost everyone's. In part, this is because Foucault's take-up, and take, on biopower only relatively recently came to general attention, and even more recently got translated into English (Foucault, 2003, 2007, 2008). It is also due to the fact that hitherto Foucault's many interlocutors were less disposed to this particular technology of power than to his conceptualization and elaboration of the knowledge/power nexus, the archive, the medical gaze, genealogy, discipline, discourse, epistemic ruptures, and the technologies of the self. In view of over 30 years of publishing on these fronts, many academics had come to the conclusion that Foucault had been 'done to death', or that his thinking, if not exactly passé, had become so thoroughly imbibed through literary and somatic turns that it could be safely left behind. As far as biopower is concerned, however, this judgment is grossly premature, since the digestion of what he actually wrote on the subject has only just begun – with something of a rush.[1] Certainly, as a result of the posthumous publication of Foucault's *Dits et Écrits: 1954–1988* (1994), and its recent four-volume translation into German (Foucault, 2001–5),[2] there has been a change of focus on Foucault's *oeuvre*, particularly around his 'analytics of power'. As Thomas Lemke points out in *Gouvernmentalität und Biopolitik* (2008: 12), until the 1990s this was of only marginal importance. Now, however, it has moved to the centre of sociological and political study. In particular, two of Foucault's concepts within the analytics of power, 'biopower' and 'governmentality', have come in for critical scrutiny.

'Governmentality' does not concern us here. Suffice it to say that it was central to Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s (Foucault, 2008) as one of several tools he devised to critique then current understandings of 'power' by pointing to historically alternative forms and fields of its practice. 'Governmentality' was directed to the different forms of administration and guidance of individual subjects and collectives in history (2001–5: vol. 4, 258–64).[3] The term 'biopower' likewise emerged out of Foucault's attempt to identify different paradigms, foras, and practices of power. It came into particular focus after the publication of his *Surveiller et punir* in 1975. There, and again in the *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976) – volume I of *La Volonté de savoir* ['the will to knowledge'] – he made clear that his interest was not in the great events of human history and human thought, but in the subtle, slow and often invisible dispositions, maneuvers and tactics that occurred in the domain of knowledge and society over time, and which traversed and linked every kind of institution (Deleuze, 1988: 25–6). These subtle changes, he argued, are reflected in specific techniques and functions of power – to be perceived less as properties than as strategies – which continuously shift their constellations over time. 'Biopower', it seemed to him, was one of these different forms of power (Foucault, 2008).

Like 'governmentality' the term was not of his own invention.[4] As Roberto Esposito reminds us in *Bíos* (16–18), its usage stretches at least as far back as 1905 when the Swedish political theorist and politician, Rudolph Kjellé, introduced it in *Stormakterna*, a work on 'geopolitics' (a word also coined by Kjellé). It was elaborated in Kjellé's *The State as a Form of Life* (1916) where geopolitical demand was seen as 'existing in close relation to an organismic conception that is irreducible to constitutional theories of a liberal framework' (*Bíos*: 16). Much the same kind of naturalization of politics or biological reconfiguration of the state was explicated through the term 'biopower' elsewhere in the interwar period (Lemke, 2008: 13–14). This was the case not only in Germany, but also in Britain, notably in Morley Roberts's *Bio-politics: An Essay in the Physiology, Pathology and Politics of the Social* (1938).[5] After the fall of the Nazi regime, however, this approach was discredited, only to enjoy an interesting renaissance in the mid-1960s with the emergence of a new area of research in Anglo-American political science: 'biopolitics'. The main assumption of this programme was that political behavior was ultimately based on biological laws.[6] Another (neo-humanist) version of 'biopolitics' emerged in political philosophy in Foucault's France in the 1960s.

Foucault's use of 'biopower', however, marked a decisive break with all former attempts to reduce the nature of politics to fixed biological determinants. Instead, he investigated the historical process in which biological life (of the individual and the collective) ultimately emerged as the central object of political strategies. In contrast to the idea that politics follows natural and timeless laws, 'biopower' in Foucault's formulation presents a break or discontinuity in the practice of power. From his perspective, power has not always been 'biopower'; rather, biopower presents a specific modern form of power dating from the 18th century and maturing in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was distinguished, first, by its

concern with the preservation and fostering of individual life and, second, by its interest in the lives of populations. As such it was defined in opposition to an earlier 'sovereign power', which operated repressively over life.

Nevertheless, Foucault's definition of biopower left much to be explained and accounted for. Not least, it left dangling the question of the historical emergence of biopolitics and 'modernity' (no less a slippery term), along with the question of 'life' itself. Of the two books under review here, that by Roberto Esposito provides a major contribution to the first question, while that by Nikolas Rose addresses the second, at the same time as demonstrating the need for conceptual clarification.

Both books shimmer with insights and acuity, *The Politics of Life Itself* through close observation and analysis of contemporary biomedical discourse and practice, *Bíos* by scrutinizing the logic of the analytical framework. Although odd bedfellows in many ways – indeed, incommensurable in certain respects – they serve wonderfully to illuminate and problematize different aspects of Foucault's conceptual thinking on biopower. Both authors share his view that biopolitics is not about impositions *on* life of the sort epitomized in the Third Reich, as usually understood in political philosophy. 'Politics', they submit, is no longer something that can be disarticulated from 'life'. Rather, they follow Foucault in his suggestion that from the late 18th century the nature of European politics began to change and that those changes correlated with emerging knowledges about 'life'. It was from that point on that 'life' and 'politics' began to fold the one into the other.

> For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal *whose politics places his existence as a living being* in question. (Foucault, 1978: 143)

To put this otherwise, 'life' in its double philosophical meaning of *zoe* (simple 'biological' life, or 'naked life' or 'bare life') and *bios* (specific human life, or qualified forms of life, including political forms of life) began to be linked, so as to refer to each other through an ever-increasing number of normative mechanisms. Today, both Rose and Esposito agree, we are much further along the road than when Foucault wrote; more and more the politics of life emerges as life itself – the whole experience of being. Where the sociologist Rose differs from the philosopher Esposito is in how to conduct the analysis of these politics. For Rose, the concept of biopower as derived from Foucault is a valuable tool for prising apart our increasingly biotechnologized and somaticized world, and for exploring how subjectivities and ethics are reconstituted thereby. It is a tool applied to an empirical analysis guided by the conviction that to arrive at an understanding of 'what is life' in contemporary culture it is necessary to investigate the ways of acting and thinking of those involved in this particular kind of politics. For Esposito, the analysis of biopower is not to be done empirically, but through the study of the semantic logic of the thing called 'biopower'. His object is to reconfigure the way we think about individual and collective 'being' within a biopolitical world.

Both authors oppose the negative casting of biopower of Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and other (mostly Italian) neo-Marxists who conceptualized it as a sovereign instrument in the exercise of biological power *over* life. For these thinkers, biopower could only lead to a repeat of the Nazis' thanatopolitics of population purification. Indeed, for Agamben in his concern with the juridical and political spaces for the exercise of power (in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [1998] among other publications), the 'first principle' of biopolitics is the politics of death. Although Esposito avoids explicit reference to Agamben and Hardt and Negri, his text is animated by the urge to counter their negative view of biopower and biopolitics and, as importantly (through close attention to language and syntax), to counter their structuralist approaches to it. Affirmative biopolitics, or what he calls the 'vitalization of politics' (xlii), is the name of the game, as Timothy Campbell clarifies in his extensive preface to *Bíos* introducing Esposito to the English-speaking world. Rose, similarly, has no interest in pursuing doomsday scenarios, except as public utterances that provide grist for the analysis of contemporary fears, hopes, evaluations and judgments around our emergent form of 'life'. Interested less in Foucault's move to destabilize the present by pointing to its contingency than in destabilizing the future 'by recognizing its openness' (5), he is insistent that today 'biology is not destiny [as the Nazis configured it] but opportunity' (51). '[N]o single future is written in our present' (5), he seeks to illustrate against critics who would argue otherwise. Specifically rejecting Agamben's pronouncement that 'the [death] camp is the diagram of the biopolitics of the present' (58) – 'the hidden dark truth of biopower', as he and Paul Rabinow elsewhere put it (2006: 201) – Rose is unequivocal in his assertion that within advanced liberal democracies 'our somatic, corporeal neurochemical individuality has become opened up to choice, prudence, and responsibility, to experimentation, to contestation, and so to a politics of life itself' (8, 58). 'Vital politics', as the politics of life is otherwise known, is thus a fairly rosy affair, or might be, so long as one does not entertain the idea that some form of Nazi biopolitics could indeed be one of the choices or opportunities, or that that opportunity has already been seized. Such views are not countenanced.

But it is not simply by this affirmativeness that the philosopher and the sociologist move forward our thinking on biopower and biopolitics. Nor (at all) is it because Esposito depends on Rose, or Rose on Esposito-like philosophizing around the politics of life. On the contrary, Esposito's problematization of biopower from a philosophical and semantic point of view is effectively justified by what Rose's empirical investigation and depiction of contemporary strategies and practices of biopower and biopolitics fail to elucidate – what Esposito refers to as the 'black box'of biopower. Together both take us closer to unlocking that black box.

From Rose's perspective, biopower is a valuable analytical resource, or simply a useful way of viewing. It is, he submits, 'more a perspective than a concept', one that 'brings into view a whole range of more or less rationalized attempts by different authorities to intervene upon the vital characteristics of human exist-

ence' (54). 'Biopolitics', in turn, is the 'specific strategies brought into view from this perspective, strategies involving contestations over the ways in which human vitality, morbidity, and mortality should be problematized, over the desirable level and form of the interventions required, over the knowledge, regimes of authority, and practices of intervention that are desirable, legitimate, and efficacious' (54). Rose elaborates these strategies in their various guises in *The Politics of Life Itself*, a collection of addresses and lightly reworked previously published articles dating from the late 1990s to the middle of the present decade. Health and biomedicine are his focuses; race, eugenics, somatic ethics, the neurochemical self, and biocitizenship his subjects. Consistently, he has his finger on the pulse of modern biomedicine, providing acute, jargon-free and often gripping analysis of its ramifications and implications for contemporary consciousness and thought.

That the politics of life have been refreshed in contemporary society is a part of the argument. For it is really only *since* the end of the Second World War, and even more recently, he contends, that a whole bio complex has come into being interlinking ethical and technological aspects in dramatically new ways. Thus medical agents of one sort or another, now routinely exercise determination over who is to be let die or begin life, and their decisions are enhanced and regulated by sophisticated medical technologies. There is also the rise of new types of patients' groups and individuals who come to define themselves largely in biological terms alone. Others now articulate their citizenship not in terms of legal rights and social duties bound to nation-states, but as active and informed biological consumers. Perhaps most crucial of all are what he and Rabinow refer to as the new circuits of *bioeconomics* that have taken shape over the past few decades. Thus we now have 'large-scale *capitalization of bioscience* and *mobilization* of its elements into new exchange relations: the new molecular knowledges of life and health are being mapped out, developed and exploited by a range of commercial enterprises, sometimes in alliance with States, sometimes autonomous from them, establishing constitutive links between life, truth and value' (Rabinow and Rose, 2006: 203).

This emphasis on the novelty of the bio complex, of its owing nothing to earlier historical periods, is not, however, a commitment to epistemic rupture. Rose's basic claim is that biological assumptions, prejudices and conceptions have always influenced political categories (such as citizenship) because, implicitly or explicitly, they order membership, participation and access to political activities. On the basis of this general assumption, Rose conceptualizes a break between the eugenic projects of the past and current biomedical practices. Biological citizenship, for example, (and, hence, biopolitics in general) stands for a new regime in the 21st century, which breaks radically with previous eugenic ambitions. What we see is a shift of political rationalities, which no longer aim at controlling risk at the level of populations, but instead target individuals, especially through the management of genetic risk. This thinking is in line with that of other scholars, such as Deborah Heath, Rayna Rapp and Karen-Sue Taussig, who similarly tend to underline the novel implications of this biopolitical move and, like Rose, do not argue for an epistemic shift so much as a historical seizure predicated upon

today's fragmentation and pluralization of political spaces (Heath *et al*., 2004; Lemke, 2008: 78). It all goes back to Rabinow's idea of biosociability as 'the emergence of new forms of representation, new forms of community and identity politics in the context of the new genetic knowledge, and which understands human nature as culturally open and technically changeable' (Lemke, 2008: 79). According to Rabinow (1996), and also Rose, there is now no simple translation of social projects into biomedical termini – like social Darwinism of old – but rather, a new configuration of social conditions via biological categories.

Even so, Rose believes, the strategies of biopower are not universal or totalizing. Biopolitics is far from being the only show in town. In the course of analysing the mutations of personhood through the concept of 'genetic risk', he submits that '[i]deas about biological, biomedical, and genetic identity will certainly infuse, interact, combine, and contest with other identity claims; I doubt they will supplant them' (113). Such reassurances lend weight to his view of the present as a place still deeply connected to the past, and which for that reason, apparently, is ostensibly less threatening. Commitment to historical continuity permits him to be wary of 'breathless epochalization' (252), or to the 'overstating [of] novelty' in contemporary biomedicine and biotechnology (33). At the same time, however, it leaves him blind to continuities of influence. Moreover, such reassurances serve not just as evidence of Rose's commitment to 'incremental rather than epochal' change; they are also the means to spare his being tarred with the brush of reductionism and over-determinism – the sins of which he accuses other social commentators on our biological times and futures, and around which he characteristically structures his interventions.

This tactic, and the gradualist view of history that it entertains, has less to do with the politics of life in which Foucault engaged in the 1970s and 1980s than with the politics of Rose – a liberal pragmatism peculiar especially to Anglo-American academics of the postmodern era who, accepting the failure of the Enlightenment project of humanity, see virtue in avoiding moral judgments. Rose's 'always open' position stands in stark contrast to, say, the anarchist democracy extolled in Chris Hables Gray's *Cyborg Citizens: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (2000). For Rose the question of how to create a common project of humanity in today's bioscientific globalized world smacks of an old-fashioned moral political agenda; it is too much of the view that humans have a responsibility to create and shape the world in which they live. A product of our times, Rose shares company with many others in the social sciences who fashionably subscribe to a view of 'the social' which is not 'social' at all in the sense of being filled with human agency and ideals of organization. The 'social' is but an environment of strategies, mechanisms and relationships ceaselessly re-created and reshaped (whether by humans, animals, or machines) through which people simply pass (Fuller, 2003: 82–3). Adopting this view, and overlooking that contemporary society continues to be structured and stuck in older ideas, practices, institutions and mechanisms of power, Rose feels no compulsion to suggest how a society of biologically ever-enhancing individuals and proliferating identities could or should organize its collective togetherness. He only vaguely alludes to such concerns

when he urges us to pursue those 'practices of intervention that are desirable, legitimate, and efficacious', or when he makes the claim for an analysis that would 'intervene in that present, and so to shape something of the future that we might inhabit' (5). But there are no concrete proposals; no suggestions as to what might come after, or out of, all the recording of new biomedical subjectivities. It is a vagueness that is popular in today's academic world run as it is by the changing fashions and fortunes of grant-giving bodies, for it permits study of almost everything but commitment to nothing – hence, a valuable strategy for the retention of patronage. This is not to say that Rose is openly opportunistic, but he does seem to suggest that one can separate the empirical analysis of contemporary life from larger questions of collective human direction and purpose. He keeps his hands clean.

It is as a means to have his cake and eat it too, that he invokes the authority and would-be personal example of Foucault. Although *The Politics of Life Itself* is fairly quiet on methodology compared to other of Rose's publications, his Foucaultianism is consistent with that to be found in his and Rabinow's 'Biopower Today' (2006). There, while lauding the analytical utility of Foucaultian concepts of biopower and biopolitics, it is confessed that Foucault's actual comments on the subjects were 'limited and sporadic'. This admission serves to justify the omission of any detailed discussion of how Foucault actually conceptualized these terms and thought of them politically (as opposed merely to explicating them historically according to the poles of populations and individuals). The suggestion is always that Foucault was somehow himself apolitical and was only concerned that people should not be made to submit to any historically devised moral consensus (Foucault, 1988, cited in Shildrick, 1997: 211). While this gives strength to an open, pluralistic future of possibilities and opportunities, it fudges the fact that during his lifetime Foucault was far from apolitical. He may not have written much on his own personal politics, but he was certainly not without them, especially in relation to initiating the voice of resistance among prisoners or psychiatric patients whom he sought to bring back into the discourse that othered them. Well known, too, is his deep interest in (and ambition to theorize) the Iranian revolution which, contrary to many of his contemporaries, he saw as a new and exemplary form of collective will that could not be thought of as emanating from categories such as class struggle or economic oppression (Foucault, 1988: 211–24; Eribon, 1991: 289). Moreover, the whole of his approach to biopolitics and biopower as well as to the epistemic ruptures of the past was of quintessentially political searches for new ways to comprehend power and politics outside of the then reigning Marxism of Sartre, Althusser and others. Thus, Foucault's position stemmed from his resistance to other positions, which were then much more influential than they are now. He never shied away from taking a stand.

The historicization of Foucault himself, which is necessary in order to understand the political immediacy behind his terms, is not on Rose's agenda. He casts Foucault simply as a Nietzsche-inspired, ostensibly apolitical analyst who managed to transcend conventional sociological structuration and idealization.

There is a sleight of hand in this move, since it involves at the same time expressing dissent from certain crucial elements in Foucault's thinking. Explicitly, Rose departs from Foucault's 'history of the present', partly on grounds of its professed familiarity and overuse, but more importantly, because it associates the user with Foucault's radical views of epistemological mutation around the idea of 'life' and its normatization. He insists that Foucault's claim of a rupture at the beginning of the 19th century 'is overstated' (42), and tethers this view to implicit dismissal of Foucault's understanding of the notion of 'life' as generally open, and as defined only through specific epistemological constellations and complexes of power at specific moments in time. For Foucault, 'life' was neither concrete nor essentialist, but a discursive correlate whose emergence proceeded hand in hand with the establishment of biology as an autonomous science (Muhle, 2008: 62–3). The meaning of 'life' for Foucault is caught in an ever-changing nexus of power/knowledge. Thus, for Foucault, it is impossible to explore the meaning of 'life' without at the same time investigating the historically correlating forms of knowledge and power. While he accepted Canguilhem's understanding of normativity as something created by the inner dynamic of an all- and ever-changing life, 'life' itself he saw as something 'to normatize' from the outside (ibid.: 63). Rose, by denying, or at least downplaying, the idea of a historical rupture, and adopting Canguilhem's thinking on normativity as emerging out of life itself, frees himself from undertaking the kind of historical analysis of the nexus of knowledge/power that Foucault regarded as central to all his projects, including that of biopower.[7] Rose tends to believe that such a genealogical analysis is impossible in today's complicated and complex world (Rose, 2009: 168). This spares him the messy historical and immanently political task that most interested Foucault: the analysis of power *dispositifs* and discourses,[8] or the study of the heterogeneous complex of beliefs, practices and technologies that he perceived as continuously affecting and shaping all contemporary life, and, significantly, that intrinsically linked past and present in life's definition and practice. Such complexity, which is also compounded by the many new bio- and neuro-techniques for making life visible, thinkable, and able to be experienced today, and by the new means to economic exploitation and control related to these techniques for manipulating life, is doubtless what inclines Rose to give up on even trying to define 'life'. Hence his opting simply for empirical observation and description. He claims in defense of his approach that at the same time as life-processes can be accessed via conscious manipulation, the question of 'what is life' is increasingly answered in enshrouded notions of probability and risk. Thus life shows an increasing tendency to indeterminacy (Rose, 2009: 168). Following Canguilhem's suggestion that the answer to the question 'what is life' needs to be found in the life of living beings themselves, Rose embarks on a task of 'vitalist' empiricism, which draws conclusions from the ways of thinking and acting of living beings in the politics of life itself. 'My aim', he declares,

> . . . is not so much to call for a new philosophy of life, but rather to explore the philosophy of life that is embodied in the ways of thinking and acting espoused by the participants in this politics of life itself. What beliefs do

> they themselves hold or presuppose about the special qualities of living things? What forms of differentiation of life and nonlife do they enact . . . ? What differences exist in the obligations that they accept towards entities at one side or the other of that divide? (49–50)

In other words, forget about searching for the 'meaning of "life"'; focus, rather, on 'the problem of "life"' – on the spaces, practices and persons that problematize it.

Thus Rose folds the authority and ostensible personal examples of Foucault and his teacher Canguilhem into his own neo-liberal political script. In the name of both (and that of postmodern theory which developed out of Foucault's work) he justifies his anti-moral stand, as well as his empirical endeavour. It is a position founded on an enthusiasm for descriptive scientific empirical analysis, born out of what Karin Knorr-Cetina calls an 'exaggerated emphasis on instrumental reason and information', which also happens, she says, to 'empower subjectivity thinking and cast doubt on social thinking' (2005: 77). Thus empirical description can stand above politics as morally motivated action, instead of confessing that it is political. It is a problem that might have been mitigated, but hardly avoided, had Rose substituted 'practice' for the more provocative-sounding 'politics'. For while empirical analysis sustains the illusion of enhanced understanding of contemporary reality, such as the construction of new subjectivities that Rose brings out so well, in fact it keeps us locked within a subjective (historically constructed) social science gaze that can never stand outside its own form of certainty, and whose mere scientizations of life purport to tell us what life really is. Its effect is to suggest that intellectuals need only gather and analyse more and more information without questioning or challenging its political implications. But this scientific pretension is based on the assumption that science is not itself morally inclined, or that it does not have as its ultimate goal – its ultimate reason for existence – the *bettering* of human life. Rose, in backing away from questions about where we go from here, or what we do with all the recordings, thus negates his own scientificity, offering us testimony only to postmodernity's disencouragement to moral certainty and assertion. In this respect, *The Politics of Life Itself* stands in stark contrast to *Bíos*, which, without any such political inhibitions, enters fully into the black box of biopower.

The Politics of Life Itself is thus left open to conventional social and political critique. While critics might mistakenly confuse Rose's description of somatic individualism with an apology for iniquitous bio-consumerism, they would nevertheless be right to worry over his ethical stand. After all, for Rose the politics of life itself focuses on 'our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures' (3). Critics can hardly be blamed, therefore, for concerning themselves with the nature of those interventions, or for expressing dismay over Rose's seeming lack of such concern. For example, that cash-strapped patient self-help groups can become prey to instrumentalized international bio-tech corporations is an issue that, though taken up by self-help groups themselves as a moral problematic, can only be pursued by Rose, at best, as part of the description of our times (Lemke,

2008: 91). Critics might worry, too, that so much of his discussion is on individual subjectivities, and scarce nothing on the social or communal forms of life that these new biologically enhanced individuals might or should entertain. His liberal openness and intellectual casualness in this regard are unsatisfactory. That the individual-subjective category spawned through the growth of technologies of the self now rules over previous social-structural ones in explaining and sustaining the political order tends to forget that individuation is itself a social phenomenon and, further, that, as Esposito has it, the individual 'is not definable outside of the political relationship with those that share the vital experience' (xxxiii). Indeed, sociology itself is abandoned here – at least the sociology that was founded on certain notions of what 'the social' was about, and sought (always as an inherently moral enterprise) to explicate it.[9]

Yet, for all Rose's mindedness to skirt morals and politics through his partial adoption of Foucault (i.e. Foucault without history), he is left blindly within the sociological lexicon. This is belied by his use of the normative categories of 'human rights', 'individualism', 'liberal democracies' and so on – old categories that, as Esposito points out, inappropriately 'continue to organize current political discourse' (13). Rose's deployment of 'biocitizenship' perhaps best conveys this entrapment. Heuristically, the term is well intended (no less than its cognate 'biosocialities' coined by Rabinow).[10] By it, he and Carlos Novas (the co-author of the chapter here that was first published in *Global Assemblages* [2005]) sought to mark a clear distinction from the notion of 'social citizenship' as articulated by T. H. Marshall (Cooter, 2008). But the very use of 'citizenship' with the prefix 'bio' to highlight difference with today's somatic individualism and consumerism (via cosmetic surgery, Viagra, Prozac and the rest) is to remain *within* the sociological parameters of Marshall. As far as the analysis of biopower goes, the problem with Rose's version of it is that it originates *in* these categories before it seeks to overturn them – a problem common to most social science analyses, as Esposito makes clear.

More profound, and the main criticism of *The Politics of Life Itself* to which *Bíos* might be seen to hearken, is the impossibility of asserting an affirmative biopolitics based on Foucault's writings without first penetrating the logic of Foucault's notion of biopower. Without opening that philosophical black box, Esposito argues, there can be no basis for the kind of optimism to which Rose's would-be Foucaultian analysis aspires. Without laying out the logical inconsistencies and possibilities of Foucault's concept, no affirmative understanding of it can be established. Indeed, in the absence of that move an affirmative biopolitics is vacuous. Furthermore, without it, Rose cannot explain the world he endeavours to describe. The tables might therefore be turned on his and Rabinow's comment on Hardt and Negri, as describing everything but analysing nothing (Rabinow and Rose, 2006: 119). From the vantage of Esposito's *Bíos*, Rose analyses everything but explains nothing, or at least nothing that goes beyond individual subjectivities emerging and shaped by the new biotechnologies.

Esposito's description of the contemporary strategies of biopower is limited to the introduction of *Bíos* where he presents four extreme international examples:

France in November 2000, when the courts ruled the right not to be born of an individual with serious genetic lesions; Afghanistan, one year later, when the oxymoronic notion of 'humanitarian bombardment' – the superimposition of a declared intention to defend life upon the production of actual death – was widely televised; Henan province, China, in February 2003, when it became public that upwards of allegedly a million and a half persons had become HIV and HCV sero-positive after their blood, from which the plasma had been extracted to sell to the rich, was reinjected into them; and finally, April 2004, when a UN report revealed that around 10,000 babies in Rwanda were the result of mass ethnic rapes committed during the genocide. All these events, Esposito claims, have escaped traditional political explanation, and through the notion of 'biopolitics' have found a new complex of meaning beyond the merely descriptive. For him these events are representative of most major political occurrences today. Through them we experience ever more intensely the indistinction between power and life. Moreover, our bodies that do the experiencing are no longer those of individuals or of sovereign nations, but rather, of a world that is both 'torn and unified' (11). Such political occurrences, he maintains, are locked within a strange double-bind logic. On one hand, we witness a growing confluence between the domains of power (or law) and that of biological life. On the other, an equally close implication seems to derive with regard to death. The question, posed by Foucault in the 1970s and which today is more pertinent than ever, is why does a 'politics of life' always risk reverting to a 'politics of death'. Foucault, allegedly, never fully answered this question; according to Esposito he refused to decide between these two hermeneutic options – refused to decide, that is, between a biopolitics that produces subjectivity or produces death, or between 'a politics *of* life or a politics *over* life' (32). Thus in Foucault's writings 'the category of biopolitics folds in upon itself without disclosing the solution to its own enigma' (32). Foucault sensed this, thinks Esposito; beyond his 'manifest intentions' there is 'an impression of insufficiency', an 'underlying reservation . . . as if Foucault himself was not completely satisfied by his own historical-conceptual reconstruction, or that he believed it to be only partial and incapable of exhausting the problem' (38). Esposito may not be the first scholar to suggest this, but he is the first not to dodge the issue by running to a biopolitics that is either absolutely positive or indecisive (like Rose) or totally negative (like Agamben). His mission is to solve the riddle of the two opposing hermeneutics, or at least to find a mode of acceptance between them, with the ultimate aim of suggesting a new subjectivity for our biopolitical times.

The beauty of *Bíos* is that, what it takes of Foucault's thought, it takes seriously in order to extend it philosophically. Not here Foucault simply for the purpose of critiquing him, or for mere explication or interlocution. Instead, Esposito probes Foucault's semantic logic through a close listening to his conceptualization of biopower. He does not sneer at the fact that Foucault's times are not ours, despite proximities, or that Foucault died before most of the biopolitical events, circumstances and technologies that preoccupy Rose became apparent. While sharing Rose's and Rabinow's regard of Foucault's concept of biopower as neither trans-historical nor metaphoric, 'but precisely grounded in historical,

or genealogical analysis' (Rabinow and Rose, 2006: 119), Esposito goes further by entering into Foucault's sources to unpick biopower as 'a productive *dispositif*' (31). He is good at revealing how, for Foucault, 'life' does not belong either to the order of nature or to that of history. 'It cannot be simply ontologized, nor completely historicized, but is inscribed in the moving margin of their intersection and their tension' (31). The meaning of biopolitics, he quotes from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, is sought '"in this dual position of life that placed it at the same time outside history, in its biological environment, and inside human historicity, penetrated by the latter's techniques of knowledge and power"'.

Esposito does not investigate the assemblages of contemporary biopower. Instead, he looks in detail at its birth in language, how it was configured over time, and how it continues today as a rhetorical puzzle. He does this in order to throw light on what he detects as Foucault's indecisiveness vis-à-vis the question of whether biopolitics follows from or coincides temporally with modernity. 'Does [biopolitics] have a historical epochal or originary dimension?' (8) First, he reveals how Foucault's writings on biopower were but a segment of a discourse specifically linked to the word 'biopower', and which stretched back to the start of the 20th century (as we mentioned above). In conducting this historicization of the semantics of 'biopower', Esposito's purpose is not to put Foucault's use of the term in its proper place as it were, nor trivially to put his ideas in their proper and appropriate context, as historians might imagine doing. Rather, it is to bring to light – for the first time – the lexical tradition of biopower, and to reveal its 'contingent and semantic intervals'. Above all, it is to highlight Foucault's break with past lexical traditions. For Esposito this allows the enigma of biopower to be explored from new angles, and helps develop a critical perspective on what he identifies as Foucault's epistemological uncertainty with regard to the 'relation between the politics of life and the ensemble of modern political categories' (8). His claim is that Foucault's uncertainty is attributable to the failure to use a more 'ductile paradigm', one that is capable of articulating in a more intrinsic manner the compelling logical interconnection between modernity and biopower. To fill this 'semantic void' he proposes the paradigm of immunization. It is a paradigm that he believes can restore the missing link in Foucault's argumentation and reveal biopower as specifically modern, for it is only in modernity, he insists, that individual self-preservation, which is inherent to the political and medical meaning of immunization, becomes the presupposition of all other political categories, from sovereignty to liberty. 'Only when biopolitics is linked conceptually to the immunitary dynamic of the negative protection of life does biopolitics of life reveal its specifically modern genesis' (9).

The paradigm of immunization (*immunitas*) as an interpretative key for political philosophy is taken 'completely elaborated' (85) from Nietzsche's works – that same source for the conceptual language of Foucault's categories, including 'biopower' (Foucault, 1986; 1980: 133). From the moment that Nietzsche proclaimed 'the soul as the immunitary form that protects and imprisons the body at the same time', Esposito claims, 'the most innovative part of twentieth-century culture begins to make implicit use of the paradigm' (47). Nietzsche is thus regarded

as an 'extraordinary seismograph of the exhaustion of modern political categories when mediating between politics and life' (9). For Esposito at least, understanding the 'immunitary semantics at the center of modern self-representation' (48) is the means to arrive at a more comprehensive analysis of the radical transformation of the political into biopolitics. More than that, these semantics are the stuff for conceptualizing a space for political thinking around the social, or what he refers to as *communitas*.

It is hard here to do full justice to the *immunitas/communitas* concept and its application, not least because the main body of the theory behind it is contained in Esposito's previously published studies, most importantly *Immunitas* (2002). The basic idea is that, just as the body operates with immunities and requires such immunities to continue life, so communities to survive as healthy regenerating systems also require immune subjects (people who do not fit in, who are 'other'). But, just as in the body, too much immunity in the community engenders its self-destruction. It is the equivalent of the auto-immune system in overdrive attacking the cells of body and killing itself. Required for a healthy creative community, Esposito maintains, is the essential interplay between *communitas* and the *immunitas*. It was this essential interplay that was missing in the Third Reich, the sustaining of which was predicated on the excessive killing of non-Aryan and other members of the community who, according to Esposito's immunitary paradigm, were in fact necessary for its survival. The absolute newness in that regime, he argues (echoing Bauman [1989] and others), 'lies in the fact that everyone, directly or indirectly, can legitimately kill everyone else' (111). Thus death became the motor of the entire social mechanism and 'carried the bio-political procedures of modernity to the extreme point of their coercive power, reversing them into thanatological terms' (111). The result was 'an absolute coincidence of homicide and suicide', a fact – crucial for Esposito – that places it 'outside of all traditional hermeneutics' (111). As he labours to prove, no political philosopher from Plato to Heidegger and Arendt has had the vocabulary necessary to explain such mechanisms and strategies. Foucault is the near exception, though he limited himself by putting racial language and concepts at the heart of biopower. Esposito analyses each philosopher in turn and finds them all to be wanting, not least, by implication, Agamben and the other modern philosophers of bio-political governmentality. As Esposito sees it, there has been no real response to the question

> . . . literally of life and death that biopolitics open[s] in the heart of the twentieth century and that continue[s] to be posed differently (though no less intensely) today. Certainly, the most pervasive attitude has been to repress or even ignore the problem. The truth is that many simply believed that the collapse of Nazism would also drag the categories that had characterized it into the inferno from which it had emerged. (148)

Hence he sees the black box of biopolitics remaining closed. Necessary to open it and render biopower affirmative, he argues, is the penetration of the semantic

logic and strategies of the Nazis, and the overturning of that regime's bio-thanatological principles of life, body and birth. The latter, he submits, need deconstructing and then reconstructing with respect to their deadly results. Only then will they reveal their originary and intense sense of *communitas*. This is no simple matter, involving as it does, among much else, the turning inside out of the philosophical concept of 'flesh' elaborated by Merleau-Ponty; the take-up of Freud's ideas on the biopolitical superimposition of birth and nation; Simondon's theory of never-ending individuation; Spinoza's concept of natural rights, and Deleuze's late thoughts on affirmative biopolitics in his 'elliptical and incomplete' (191) last work, *Pure Immanence* (2001). The long and the short of it is that in order to understand political action in our world and to avoid another thanatological catastrophe we need to change the language of politics and, above all, its definition of the subject.

Manifestly Esposito's agenda is not a simple instrumental one for political action through biopower. Rather, it is a demand for deep sensitivity to the history and language of biopower. Those who accuse him of providing no 'practical philosophical alternatives' to the direct contestations of life of the sort with which he begins *Bíos* entirely miss the point (Empson, 2009: 59). If, like Rose, Esposito declines any invitation to specific political agendas, it is not because he thinks it is academically suspect, but rather, unlike Rose, because he fears that without the re-investigation of our current political categories, including those of political action, we will continue to unleash the lethal power/potential of biopolitics. For the philosopher as for the sociologist, the task is not that of 'proposing models of political action that make biopolitics the flag of a revolutionary manifesto or merely something reformist' (12). However, for Esposito, unlike for Rose, this is not because that is too radical a concept – too subjective, ideational, or romantic. Rather, it is because it is not radical enough. What is required today, he argues, is not to think of life as a function of politics (which has become impossible because of the way the categories have folded into each other), but to begin to think politics within the same form of life *as* life (12). This is a commitment to a reformulation of thinking about being, and of finding a new way of 'talking' about it. Behind it lurks the question that Rose never asks and would advise against asking, namely, what is the ultimate purpose of all this 'making life'; what ultimately do we want collective humanity to be? More immediately, Esposito's call is to the recognition that the categories of contemporary sociology and political philosophy are themselves often inside older biopolitical conceptualization. If Rose is against reductionism in the analysis of biopolitics, Esposito is against reduction to any form of political philosophy that tries to explicate biopower while remaining locked within its categories. He invents the term 'impolitical' to indicate this irreducibility. This then connects to his politics of non-transcendence – his belief that there can be no transcendability; existence does not transcend, he insists, there is only the decision of an individual to be *just there* – to be constantly creating and re-creating existence. Such, for him, is an affirmative biopolitics that is no longer *over* life but *of* life. The pity is that it takes so long for him to clear the ground to stake his claim for a

new subjectivity founded on a new trans-semantic language that always has the collective within it. It leaves him with a mere 20 pages for this denouement.

Bíos is not an easy book to come to terms with, especially if, like us, you have no background in philosophy. Esposito's address is first and foremost to his professional colleagues, and above all to those of them engaged in the debate over biopolitical governmentality. Too, Esposito's text is not made the easier (though it is made the more fascinating and compelling) by his meticulous devotion to language and his defense of it over forms of structural analysis. It is not easy, but then why should it be? Indeed, how could it be? To get outside the whale never is. What *is* easy is facile snipping at Esposito's 'high brow academic philosophy', and his production, allegedly, of 'a verbal stunt in a semantic universe without gravity' (Empson, 2009: 58, 52). Another reviewer indicts him for spending too much time going back to Nietzsche and to the Euro-centric thanatopolitics of Nazism, instead of attending to changes in contemporary biology and neo-Darwinianism, and to changes in political economy in its relation to neo-liberal theory, policy and practice (Shaviro, 2009). These critics have a point, but since there is in fact no one way to open up the black box of biopower, Esposito's aim and pursuit are not unimportant. And so long as the semantic logic of the thanatopolitical practices of the Nazis remains untheorized we will, like it or not, always run the risk of a return. Language does create realities we have known at least since the literary turn, though whether language is the only thing that makes identity in today's world of the biologically enhanced is another matter. For Esposito, unpicking the bio-juridical logic of politics, particularly Nazism, lies at the very heart of formulating an affirmative biopolitics.

However, also lying at that heart is his longing for a new trans-individual semantics that in fact follows in its origin Canguilhem's notion of normativity out of life itself, and hence does not subject life to the transcendence of a norm, but, rather, makes the norm the immanent impulse of life (194). To this extent, Esposito shares company with Rose and, like him – albeit from a totally different perspective and for wholly different reasons – in fact fudges Foucault while proclaiming scrupulous devotion to his thought. *Bíos*, as Timothy Campbell insists, is 'nothing short of a modern genealogy of biopolitics that begins and ends in philosophy' (vii). But that is the problem: the breadth of Foucault's thinking on biopower cannot be done justice to through a focus entirely on political philosophy and its language. Foucault's genealogical method was in fact an attempt to move beyond exclusively discursive regimes, by relating their appearance and change to elements external to discourse and knowledge. In thinking on biopower over the course of his life, he moved away from his initial analysis of the immanent rules and possibilities of discourse to an investigation of the necessary interaction with elements outside it, and which he believed ordered knowledge at any given moment. He spoke of this in an interview in 1976:

> I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a

> language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no 'meaning', though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail – but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as logic of communication, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. 'Dialectic' is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and 'semiology' is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue. (Foucault, 1980: 114–15)

Esposito's *Bíos* cannot therefore claim to be a coherent continuation of Foucault's thinking on biopower, any more than this can be said of Agamben's *Homo Sacer*. True, Foucault did not prioritize the specific semantics of Nazi biopower and its biothanato principles, which Esposito sees as the precondition for a possibility of a new affirmative regime of biopower. It is quite in order, then, for Esposito to aim to solve Foucault's apparent epistemological uncertainty in regard to 'biopower' particularly in its Nazi disguise. But the question remains whether a philosophical investigation of his kind is able to solve such 'uncertainties'. Was Foucault really unable to formulate an affirmative connotation of biopower, or was it that his understanding of biopower and his genealogical method to investigate it were never intended for that purpose?

Bíos, no less than Rose's *The Politics of Life Itself*, then, fails to capture the inherent historicity of Foucault's thinking on biopower. Driven by the compulsion to turn biopower away from its negative past and towards an affirmative future, it too forecloses on the 'messiness' that was constitutive of Foucault's view of 'life' – a view of 'life' perceived as methodologically empty and open to meaningfulness only through historically specific epistemological constellations and knowledge/power. Semantic engagement with biopower from the perspective of political philosophy cloaks quite as much as the mere empirical description of it in contemporary life. Although *Bíos* lies outside the would-be apolitical objectivity of *The Politics of Life Itself*, it does not in the final analysis provide its measure through political philosophy. Yet, like Rose's work, by what it does as much as by what it does not do, it compels serious attention to biopower, engagement now essential for comprehending the biopolitical present of which we have become inescapably a part. Neither book opens the black box of biopower as Foucault might have done, but in his wake they leave it substantially cracked.

Roger Cooter and Claudia Stein

NOTES

1 Among recent works, besides those heading this review, are Nadesan (2008); Lemke (2008); Muhle (2008); Weiß (2009); Raman and Tutton (2010). Pioneering, in many respects, was the brief intervention by Donnelly (1992), and the more substantial ones by Lemke (2001), and Rabinow and Rose (2006), the first version of which ('Thoughts on the Concept of Biopower Today') was a presentation in 2003.

2 Only a fraction of the writings in *Dits et Écrits* has been translated into English.

3 The word stems from the French adjective *gouvernemental* [concerning the government] not, as often thought, from the compound of *gouverner* [to rule] and *mentalité* [way of thinking] which has led many commentators to reduce Foucault's use of it to 'thinking about government' (Lemke, 2007; 2008: 12–13; Krasmann and Volkmer, 2008; Purtschert, Meyer and Winter, 2008; Schäfer, 2009). According to Lemke (2007: 354) Foucault deployed the concept of governmentality 'as a "guideline" for a "genealogy of the modern state" embracing a period from Ancient Greece up until contemporary forms of neo-liberalism'. Cf. Nadesan (2008: 217) who acknowledges it as 'a rather slippery concept that Foucault at times used to describe his *method* of analyzing the governmentalization of the liberal state, and at other times referred more concretely to historically specific arts of government, or governmentalities, linking the individual to social relations of power'.

4 Roland Barthes used 'governmentality' in his *Mythologies* (1957).

5 On Roberts, see Hayward (2000).

6 Esposito (22) refers to Lynton K. Caldwell's 1964 article 'Biopolitics: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy', which drew from James C. Davies, *Human Nature in Politics* published the year before. On the use of biopolitics in recent eugenic scholarship, see Levine and Bashford (2010). For an overview of biopolitics from the 1970s to the 1990s, see Somit and Peterson (1998).

7 On Foucault and Canguilhem's different understandings of 'norms' and 'life', see Muhle (2008: 162–4). See also Macherey (1991: 187), who demonstrates that Foucault's understanding of 'norms' is intrinsically historical. In contrast to Canguilhem (1994), who believed in an inner dyamic of life creating normativities, Foucault was interested in the causation, dynamics and action of norms.

8 *Dispositif* was Foucault's means to avoid referring to 'structure'; it was a way to indicate something that gives shape to 'discourse'. See Veyne (2008: 180, n. 17, and 11–28), which is far superior to the discussion by Deleuze (1992).

9 Steve Fuller (2003) similarly critiques Bruno Latour.

10 'Biosocialities' has also recently been adopted and elaborated empirically in Gibbon and Novas (2008) which contains an 'afterword' by Rabinow.

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