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# THE MEMBRANE AND THE DIAPHRAGM

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## *derrida and esposito on immunity, community, and birth*

> The front is a skin, a selective "membrane", admitting only the homogeneous, the assimilable, or rather, that which is heterogeneous but considered to be "beneficial."
> *Derrida*, Echographies

> If anything, the immune system must be interpreted as an internal resonance chamber, like the diaphragm through which difference, as such, traverses us.
> *Esposito*, Immunitas *18*

> No community is possible that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity.
> *Derrida*, *"Faith and Knowledge" 51*

For Esposito, the other to whom we are originally open is not sexually differentiated, whereas sexual difference is a frequent figure of alterity in Derrida's work. As they reflect on the history of political philosophy, it is true that Derrida and Esposito have both focused on the fraternity of political bonds. When Esposito asks, "what precisely is a 'fraternal' democracy?"(*Bíos* 173), the answer leads him, as it also does Derrida in *Politics of Friendship*, to an interpretation of fraternity as a mode of immunity. But the question will lead Derrida to closer interrogations of the absence of women and sisters in the tradition of political philosophy (*Politics* 149, 155, 186). It leads him to an interest in questions such as: what happens when the sister is made a case of the brother?; and: what is a friend in the feminine? (ibid. viii, 56); and to a deconstruction of the simultaneously non-literal and strangely literal status of the "brother" (ibid. 93) which permits the historical exclusion of the "sister" from political community and political claims. These are welcome interrogations from Derrida which Esposito does not broach.

Instead, the interest in fraternity will lead Esposito to a reflection more specifically on the preoccupation with birth as a biopoliticization of fraternity which becomes an increasingly violent approach to reproduction with the capacity to culminate in the thanatopolitical theatres of blood associated with auto-immunity (*Bíos* 169ff.). Interestingly, women do find themselves playing an important rhetorical role in Esposito's work at this point. This occurs in his conceptualization of both immunity and community, even though neither of these becomes the context for a philosophy inflected by sexual difference. He identifies specific forms of violence towards women – specific forms of thanatopolitics – at the extremes of the immune paradigm. And he

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draws on the figure of the mother, and her relationship to the fetus, to offer new images of community.

On the one hand, a feminist reading can welcome the critical attention Esposito gives to these thanatopolitical modes. On the other, the use of maternity as a positive figure of community is less promising. It arises in part because Esposito, identifying the thanatopolitical captures of reproductive life, proposes conceptual alternatives: just as new and transformative norms of life would replace normativized life; and just as a Merleau-Pontyian flesh is proposed by Esposito as a conceptual alternative to body; similarly, birth as exteriorization is proposed as an alternative to birth's thanatopolitical modes (of which the example proposed is the Nazi immune measure of – as Esposito describes it – suppressing birth (*Bíos* 169)).

But in the absence of any other significant role for sexual difference, any other means of distinguishing men and women, and any other specific reference to women in Esposito's work on the immune paradigm, women's role in his work is reduced to maternity – and this very much in contrast to the extensive status and complex treatment of sexual difference in Derrida's work.

One can, moreover, criticize not only the reduction of women to the role of maternity but also their reduction to a particular image of maternity. Consider, as an example, how the reconfiguration of maternity as an affirmative opening to life will lead Esposito, in his discussion of the immune paradigm in *Bíos*, to refer to Rwandan mothers who end up embracing the children who ensued from genocidal rapes: "that all Rwandan mothers of the war, when asked about their experience, declared their love for their children born of hate signifies that the force of life prevails once again over that of death" (*Bíos* 7). True, Esposito is engaged in a project of offering positive alternative images to the thanatopolitical capture of birth. As a result, however, 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 anticipation of life must also include an anticipation of the monstrous.

Comparing Esposito's and Derrida's work more specifically from the perspective of their treatment of maternity allows a consideration of Derrida's indirect use of birth as figure of the monstrous *arrivant*, particularly in light of the fact that an affirmation of this inevitable possibility is missing from Esposito's work. I will argue that from the perspective of a Derridean reading, Esposito's work remains, *at least to this extent*, subordinated to the immune paradigm it also explicates, a persisting immune paradigm for which the representations of maternity are emblematic.

## I figures of perversion

A number of commentators have begun to consider the ways in which Derrida and Esposito can be compared, but must also be differentiated, in their articulation of immunity.[1] Because these accounts diverge significantly, particularly in their conclusions and in the connotation each gives to the figure of auto-immunity, the similarities are, if anything, the more surprising, for on a number of points they do come into close proximity.

Though Esposito's work does not share the deconstructive form of reading that Derrida brings to the history of philosophy, linguistics, and contemporary politics, nor the specific interest in the differing and deferring work of *différance*, Esposito and Derrida agree on much concerning the incoherence, and dangers, of projections of immunization against alterity. According to both philosophers, such projects attempt the protection and defense of an ideal state which is represented as anterior – but is incoherent as such. For both, what is defended is in fact impossible, it cannot be immunized, kept "*sain et sauf*" ("Faith and Knowledge" 2), despite the efforts of the immunitary project. For Derrida any seemingly original state of ideal origin, identity, nature or community

would be riven by *différance*, whereas for Esposito the most original state would always be the original expropriation of *munus*. And for both, immunitary projects belie their own impossibility and easily turn to violence. In *Immunitas*, immunity is introduced by Esposito partly as an "interpretive category" for phenomena as various as those discussed by Derrida: "phenomena such as the battle against a new resurgence of an epidemic, opposition to an extradition request for a foreign head of state accused of violating human rights, the strengthening of barriers in the fight against illegal immigration, and strategies for neutralizing the latest computer virus […] – not to mention a terrorist attack" (*Immunitas* 1–2; see also *Terms of the Political* 132).

While both of them turn their attention to immunitary defenses which attempt an impossible and violent defense of an absent presence, the reasons for this impossibility are differently parsed. For Derrida, attempts at immunity, at keeping ideals "*sain et sauf*," do lead to many of the same violent extremes identified by Esposito. But auto-immunity is retained as a figure of necessity, not as a figure of all that goes wrong with immunity. Auto-immunity takes on a negative connotation in Esposito's work. For Derrida, it can have a positive connotation: it can, as we will see, refer to the way in which democracy (impossibly) can take place only by not taking place. It can also refer to unpredictable transformations of the reserves of inherited language – with results which may be negative or positive. For example, in *Rogues* Derrida describes as "auto-immune" the perversion of democracy which occurs when a culture and political language ("in line with a Greco-European ideal") are violently imposed by a colonizing nation on a colonized people. Colonialism might be promoted as a means of defending the interests of Europe and its democratic heritage and values. But, promoted by means of the imposition of a foreign legal system, administration, and educational system, by means of colonial violence, the acquisition of territory, the disappropriation of peoples and the failure to accord them the full rights of the colonizers, the democratic project is not only defended but also undermined by its colonialism. Colonialism is a hegemonic expression of democracy's expansionist ambitions which could be understood in this sense as its own auto-immunity: it undermines its own values as it seeks to extend its territory. But in the same discussion Derrida points out that the resulting colonial order can also be understood, in a more promising and optimistic sense, as auto-immune. For the measures which defend the colonizer's interests (the violent imposition of a Greco-European culture and political language) may also do double-duty in offering new conceptual and contextual resources for the countering political claims by colonized peoples to equal status, equal representation, or independence, sometimes leading to resistance, civil war, reform, or independence (*Rogues* 34–35).

## II derrida's auto-immunity

Discussing his usage of the term auto-immunity in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (and referring to his "Faith and Knowledge"), Derrida describes his proposal "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'" ("Autoimmunity" 187 n. 7).[2] How can we understand the divergence between Esposito's and Derrida's concept of auto-immunity such that Derrida can include an affirmative variant of the term, where Esposito will not?[3]

In one of Derrida's variants, cultural, psychic or security mechanisms are described as containing the *possibility* of becoming the vehicle for harm[4] to what they defend. This is closest to some understandings of the biological model of auto-immunity where, similarly, there is an occasional turn by a defensive system against the entity it otherwise protects. So we see Derrida's description of the West producing many of the devices (training techniques or weapons) used against it by terrorists, most obviously in 9/11 ("Autoimmunity" 115).[5] Similarly the availability of flight training schools, of an extensive network of domestic

air travel and the predictable routines of airports would be considered components defending an American way of life which *also* provided the capacity for a means of attack on America by terrorists:

> it is perhaps because the United States has a culture and a system of law that are largely democratic that it was able to open itself up and expose its greatest vulnerability to immigrants, to, for example, pilots in training, experienced and suicidal "terrorists" who were […] trained on the sovereign soil of the Unites States […] The "terrorists" are sometimes American citizens […] they received help in any case from American citizens; they took American airplanes, took over the controls, and took to the air in American planes and took off from American airports. (*Rogues* 40)

In what could be distinguished as a second model of auto-immunity, Derrida describes the intensification of attack provoked by the intensification of the defense mechanism – according to this variant of the immune mechanism, the stronger the defense mechanism the greater the consequent intensification of risk or danger. For example, in "Autoimmunity" Derrida describes the auto-immune model in terms of psychoanalytic understandings of repression and trauma ("all these efforts to attenuate or neutralize the effect of the traumatism (to deny, repress, or forget it, get over it) are but […] so many autoimmune moments. Which produce, invent and feed the very monstrosity they claim to overcome" ("Autoimmunity" 99). He describes this stimulation of what one means to defend against (the "perverse effect" of "autoimmunity") as having both psychoanalytical and political registers:

> What will never let itself be forgotten is thus the perverse effect of the auto-immunitary itself. For we now know that repression in both its psychoanalytical senses and its political sense – whether it be through the police, the military, or the economy – ends up producing, reproducing and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm. (Ibid.)

Derrida also proposes a number of geopolitical tactical variants, such as smart bombs which provoke their victims to respond all the more strenuously, and terrorist attacks on America stimulated rather than deterred by the defense mechanisms against terrorism (ibid. 100). Esposito, describing a crescendo of immune mechanisms, has also argued that these follow the movement of acceleration. But he is describing the trends associated more specifically with late modernity as biologically oriented immune mechanisms have increasingly come to dominate political realities and imaginaries.[6] He is in agreement with Foucault, as Derrida is not,[7] with respect to the location of a threshold of new techniques and new political modes, a critical shift towards political formations concerned not only to maximize life but in extreme variants (and Esposito stresses the growing prevalence of these) to defend human life from contamination (*Terms* 130).[8]

According to a third variant of Derridean auto-immunity, where a defense mechanism aspires to immunize against a threat which appears exterior but is in fact constitutive, the terror against which steps are taken will always have been within: in this sense "the enemy is *also always* lodged on the inside of the system it violates and terrorizes" ("Autoimmunity" 188). This time Derrida refers to a defense mechanism which must inevitably turn, or "already will have" turned, on what it putatively defends. Here the point is not that a defense mechanism *could* turn self-destructive (or, as in the second variant, that it is likely to do so with ever increasingly velocity). Rather, on the third model the defensive mechanism by virtue of its very existence has already destroyed what it ought to have defended. On the first variant: this "could happen"; on the second variant, if it "could" happen, it will do so in the movement of crescendo and stimulation. On the third variant, the destruction in question has "already happened." It is not a defense mechanism that could harm, it is a defense mechanism which is *always already* the harm in question.

Examples in Derrida's work are seen, for example, in "Faith and Knowledge," when

Derrida describes an "autoimmune rejection of technoscience by means of technoscience" (Naas 203). Religion turns to technoscience to defend itself against the contaminations of technoscience. The techniques intended to offer immunity will already be examples of the harm against which defense is sought: thus auto-immune. Like the extensive appeal to technology to disseminate a message about the dangers of technology, further examples would be seen in the use of violent measures to protect against becoming a violent society. One of Derrida's best-known examples concerns the suspension of the Algerian elections in 1992, conceivable as a setting aside of democracy in the interests of defending democracy. To protect democracy against being undermined by its own process, democracy is set aside (the very danger against which the measure is intended to protect):

> The electoral process in Algeria would be […] typical of all the assaults on democracy in the name of democracy […] They decided in a sovereign fashion to suspend […] democracy for its own good, so as to take care of it, so as to immunize it against a much worse and very likely assault. (*Rogues* 33)

If these are variants in which defense mechanisms are concurrently (and sometimes undecidably) defensive and harmful, they may be variants whereby harm and good, protection and defense, blur conceptually to the point of becoming indistinguishable from each other.[9]

Both Esposito and Derrida agree that immune mechanisms must fail, and all the more so the more vigorously they are enforced. Yet they account differently for this failure. Derrida's conceptual point of reference for this failure is the spacing, differing, and deferring of *différance*, seen when some kind of measure, some *pharmakon*, offers both "cure" (seeming to restitute a deferred presence) and "poison" (the presence it would restitute must always be deferred). Immune mechanisms will be those of the *pharmakon*, they will constitute both poison and cure. This gives one sense in which, for Derrida, immunity is really a form of auto-immunity. But while, and Esposito agrees, immunity must fail and must be identified as auto-immunity, we saw one sense in which Derrida *also* describes potentially positive senses of auto-immunity (the pervertibility of democracy *may* amount to the perfectibility of democracy – but the reverse is also true).

Much earlier, in *Positions*, Derrida had commented that while *différance* connotes the differing and deferring which suspends figures of putative originality or ideal identity or subjectivity (whether they pertain to nature, meaning or psychic life) it also is the condition for effects of subjectivity and meaning, although through their own paradoxical non-taking place, and their never being fully present.[10] In a similar sense, Derrida is also able to propose in *Rogues* that democracy be thought in terms of *différance*, which can be understood as auto-immunity. As Juliane Rebentisch presents this component of an argument from *Rogues*, since a thorough democracy is always postponed "democracy is securing itself by restricting itself, thereby threatening its own principles. This is why democracy is never really what it is" (Rebentisch 928).[11]

Again, auto-immunity is, in Derrida's work, given a potentially positive connotation, as when it can be said that democracy can only take place by never fully taking place: by restricting itself, by necessarily threatening itself. Hospitality and the pardon would also, in this sense, be their own auto-immunity, only able to take place by not entirely taking place, or by simultaneously counteracting themselves.[12] Thus, Derridean conditionality (elaborated in his discussions of hospitality, the gift and the pardon) would also offer another way of thinking about auto-immunity. Insofar as a limit is set to democracy, to tolerance, or indeed to hospitality in such examples, they restrict themselves, threatening their own principles. But auto-immunity could be said to allow them to "take place" (albeit in a paradoxical taking place occurring only through the work of differing and deferring, thus under the concurrent sign of their never fully taking place). Yet one should be wary of associating this idea with an overly positive reassurance: it is not

that democracy decidably takes place *despite* never fully taking place. It is particularly challenging, in a deconstructive context, to do justice to the concurrent ideas of taking place "as/and" never fully taking place, but worth remembering Derrida's intermittent stress on the devastating ways in which democracy may not fully take place (his examples include the denial of rights to disenfranchised groups, the suspension of elections, political forms of racism, Eurocentrism, colonialism) despite its being true that it could not fully take place.[13]

## III community, violence and the immune paradigm

In *Echographies*, Derrida explains his general reservations about the term community and its schemas of identity and unity (66). In *Of Grammatology*, he had deconstructed Rousseau's ideal of community: what Rousseau thinks of as community could only take place through the spacing, differing and deferring which appear to impede it. It seems as if large dispersed cities are an impediment to the small communities whose decision making could be accomplished by face-to-face negotiation. But the distance and alienation attributed by Rousseau to large dispersed cities pertains to all communities, including the smallest, no matter how physically proximate and intimate are the participants. Like democracy in its incompletion, community can be thought of as only possible through the *différance*, the delay, the deferred presence, in this case the lack of immediacy and spacing that seem to constitute its impediment. *Différance* would then be the auto-immunity of community in this "constitutive" sense.

For Derrida there is no account of community that could be otherwise described. We need spacing, deferring, differing, hollowing out to have anything approximating community. If he objects to the term "community" it is because it partakes of a language of the common, unity, and presence. If he refers to community, then, it will have to be a notion of the comm-auto-immunity, with concurrently negative and positive senses. So it is that in "Faith and Knowledge" (51) we find that he does refer to the term "auto-co-immunity" in a discussion of concepts of community which refer (undermining themselves as they do so) to the defense of blood, birth, nation, state, origin. This prompts the question of what kind of community could be affirmed: only a variant somehow affirmative of the necessity of its *différance*.

One of the points of convergence between Derrida and Esposito seems therefore to emerge insofar as Derrida understands community in these terms, and as only able to "take place" through not taking place. For Esposito also, although through a different means of theorizing its original lack and opening towards difference, community could only take place in its own absence from itself. It must be retheorized as the shared *lack* of the common and proper, with Esposito deriving analytic power from the image of having in common that we cannot have identity, self-presence or integrity in common, and that we are originally expropriated from ourselves. The starting position seems to be similar, with Esposito suggesting that anterior to any possible community is its *munus* – the opening to the other understandable in terms of gift, duty, obligation, the push towards externality, exposure, original expropriation. Certainly, as does Derridean *différance* (though by virtue of a different analysis, and different conceptual devices for theorizing alterity), Esposito's *munus* makes conceptually impossible a self-present or fully immunized community grounded in interiority and self-enclosure. A Derridean perspective concurs that we are best understood as united, not as in community but in our subtraction from an (im)possible community (and similarly, must be understood not as identities but as subtractions from (im)possible identities). If community takes place, they seem to agree, it is only in a paradoxical sense, only in and through such ongoing subtractions (paradoxical subtractions, of course, given that we are subtractions from no possible unity), and this would offer another sense in which one could say that community can only take place through not taking place, or, through not fully taking place.

Moreover, Esposito will also refer to Derridean *différance* in ways which make it sound closer to his own account of immunity:

> As Derrida has argued in a form that reinstates the logic and semantics of the immune lexicon, the *pharmakon* is what is opposed to its other not by excluding it but, on the contrary, by incorporating and vicariously substituting it […] The *pharmakon* is both the evil and what opposes it […] it is itself to the extent it is other […] above all [the *pharmakon*] relates to life from the ground of its reverse. More than affirming life it negates its negation. (*Immunitas* 127)

But for Esposito an affirmative biopolitics, an affirmation of life, would offer an *alternative* to an immune logic here associated with the logic of the *pharmakon*, or *différance*. A theorizing of community in terms of *différance* alone would, from Esposito's perspective, lack the transformative conceptual resources that he attributes to an alternative, affirmative biopolitics. And while Derrida's rethinking community in terms of a necessary *différance* does seem equivalent as an analytic tool to Esposito's thinking community in terms of a necessary *munus* (openings towards the other, to be affirmed as such, rendering autonomy and purity impossible, violent aspirations), Esposito nonetheless associates Derridean *différance* and the *pharmakon* too specifically with the negative variants of a destructive immune paradigm, to also associate it with a (albeit entirely unpredictable) positive potential, as Derrida does.

So the effect of Esposito identifying *différance* with the movement of immunity is as follows. When he comments that

> as the largely fundamentalist and xenophobic currents of some neocommunitarian groups demonstrate today, nothing has a stronger immunizing effect than a community that completely "owns" itself, and which is then not common with respect to what does not belong to it (*Immunitas* 100),

we recognize that this is a remark akin to the form of Derrida's wariness about identitarian politics – for example, in *Monolinguism of the Other*, *The Other Heading* and elsewhere.[14] But whereas Esposito sees immunitarian violence manifesting in the vicious denial of *munus* and the denial of a shared *lack* of belonging, Derrida associates immunitarian violence with the disavowal of *différance*. Perhaps the terminological and conceptual disagreement on this point is best seen in Esposito's acknowledgements that a degree of the immune paradigm is conducive to life, but beyond a certain threshold it will only be increasingly destructive, thus auto-destructive and thanatopolitical (*Terms* 61). Notwithstanding Esposito's own discussion of the *pharmakon* in terms of "modern immunitary procedures" in this same passage from *Terms of the Political*, this is not the case for Derrida. In other words, while Derrida certainly describes *différance* as needed for life (just like the subject, and democracy, life can be defined as "divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral" (*Positions* 29)), one would not say of *différance* (as Esposito says of immunity) that "it is needed for protecting our life, [but] if carried past a certain threshold, winds up negating life." There is no conceptual threshold *beyond* which *différance* converts into violent excess. Rather, it is the denial of *différance* (the aspiration to self-enclosure, self-identity) which amounts (and leads) to violent excess. For Derrida *différance* (in this sense, auto-immunity, a life which could only take place through its own not fully taking place) is essential to a life always mediated by death, and violent, fundamentalist, xenophobic, and "self-owning" aspirations to identity manifest in the disavowal of this necessity.

In sum, while both philosophers agree that immune paradigms lead to violent excesses in their attempts to defend and protect against risk and contamination, Esposito saves the term auto-immune for those violent excesses, the deadly or auto-negating extremes. For Derrida we saw it is a more general term, including some of what Esposito includes under the immune paradigm, but also the original *différance* perhaps most in proximity with (but not conceptually identical to) what Esposito

might associate with *munus*. While it is true that *différance*, like *munus*, offers both philosophers viable ways of understanding the possibilities and realities of community, we see the divergence between them in the fact that for Derrida this never fully taking place is *best* understood as auto-immune, and in the fact that auto-immunity is understood by Derrida in *potentially* positive senses, and not just as the destructive excess and inclinations towards subordination, and defensive violence, of the immune paradigm. Because Derrida's stress is just as much on the negative variants of auto-immunity, the accounts of auto-immunity offered by Derrida and Esposito may intermittently seem close. But Esposito describes a violent collapse *from* immunity *to* (in *Esposito's* sense) the extreme of auto-immunity, whereas for Derrida immunizations will *always* have been (in *Derrida's* sense) auto-immune. Moreover, that fact is to be affirmed as having a transformative potential, and as having what Esposito identifies in Derrida's work as a messianic sense: amounting to an opening to an unknown, contentless future.

## IV life, and the thanatopolitical extreme of the immune paradigm

I turn now to Esposito's accounts of the extreme of the immune paradigm, so as to begin situating the figures of pregnancy and birth in these contexts. We have seen that Esposito describes a model according to which "life cannot be preserved except by placing inside it what it is meant to counter or that which is meant to counter it" (*Immunitas* 8–9). The error of immunity would be seen in the attempt to *preserve* life – in the attempt to preserve stasis, to defend against transformation, deny the necessity of the homeopathic, and in the attempt to defend against what is figured as the threat from without. Describing the violent excesses associated with preservational effort, the term immune is used (though not only) to describe killing a part of oneself as a means of defending oneself, leading to the thanatopolitical extreme that one's own death might be associated with the defense of one's life. Esposito describes the specificity of the Nazi thanatopolitical extreme of biopolitics seen with the complete collapse of the division between biology and politics (*Bíos* 112). The furthest extremes of thanatopolitical defenses of life are also seen in the last days of the Nazi regime, with the promotion of the collective suicide of the entire German people *as* the means of preserving the German people (ibid. 111).[15] But Esposito's *Bíos* also opens with contemporary instances of (extreme) claims that life may sometimes be best defended by its own termination or forestalling: a case before the European Court in which a severely disabled child is represented by legal arguments that its life would best have been defended by the abortion his mother would have preferred; the murder by a Russian commando unit of hostages held by Chechen terrorists under the pretext this best defended their lives; and "humanitarian" bombing in Afghanistan, where the argument was put that lives were lost in the defense of the interests of those same lives.

Certainly, some of the examples recounted in the Introduction to *Bíos* could be otherwise depicted, but Esposito is particularly interested in contexts where the complete destruction of an entity is presented as the means of its putative defense. Not denying the many instances of biocracy in which racism's sub-divisions create caesurae within the "*biological continuum* addressed by biopower" (*Society Must Be Defended* 55) in the form of sub-groups directly or indirectly harmed as collateral damage, acceptable margins, or the object of explicit genocide in the supposed interests of the remainder, Esposito is particularly interested in a variant exemplifying the immune paradigm where "life" is described or describable as annihilated to preserve "life."

Among these, Esposito also considers *reproductive* variants of the violent and thanatopolitical excesses of biopolitics. Consider the last chapter of *Bíos*, as he turns to the reproductive thanatopolitics of German National Socialism – understood by Esposito in terms of the immunitary paradigm doing its worst:

> What the immunitary paradigm adds is the recognition of the homeopathic tonality that Nazi therapy assumes. The disease against which the Nazis fight to the death is none other than death itself. What they want to kill in the Jew and in all human types like them isn't life, but the presence in life of death: a life that is already dead because it is marked hereditarily by an original and irremediable deformation: the contagion of the German people by a part of life inhabited and oppressed by death. (*Bíos* 137)

Jews were deemed the internal enemy of Aryan aspirations but Esposito focuses on the Aryan nation understood as destroying a part of "itself"[16] – connecting this with a number of the examples of immunitary excess offered in the Introduction to *Bíos*, which share the ambiguous paradox of immunity. Similarly Esposito can present as a possible formulation that "Afghan lives" are killed as a means of defending "their" lives.[17] He chooses to focus on the possibility of killing a part of one's own state not as race bifurcation but instead as self-destruction. We see this particularly in the discussion of sterilization. Thus Esposito moves from this:

> Life is now defended by the state against every possible contamination. Racial hygiene is the immunitary therapy that aims at preventing or extirpating the pathological agents that jeopardize the biological quality of future generations (*Bíos* 128);

to the claim that sterilization is therefore

> the most radical modality of immunization because it intervenes at the root at the original point in which life is spread. It blocks life not in any moment of its development as its killer but in its own rising up – impeding its genesis, prohibiting life from giving life, devitalizing life in advance. (Ibid. 132)

Elaborating, Esposito comments that "it might seem paradoxical wanting to stop degeneration (whose final result was sterility) through sterilization." It seems paradoxical only if one fails to realize that such paradox (also presented by him as the negative doubling of the negative) is "an essential part, indeed the very basis of the immunitary logic itself" (ibid.).[18] Thus when the immune paradigm is associated with a suicidal tendency, one of the most extreme manifestations is identified by Esposito (in an account not to be found in either Foucault or Derrida) as the forestalling of life before it begins.[19] Forced deaths associated with eugenic programs are not only, in their thanatopolitical expression, the deaths of those killed but are also, as he puts it, a programmed annihilation in advance of the lives to which the murdered lives could have given life (ibid. 143–45).

Derrida does not elaborate a reference to life forestalled in advance. But when he does turn to nationalist and ethnocentric attempts to defend and protect purity, identity, origin, and also stresses their trend towards increasing violence, he includes the turn to eugenics in this context. For his part he describes efforts of self-immunization which he attributes to fundamentalist religions which perceive threat in modern technologies, as when

> the so-called return of religion tries to go back to the literality of idiom, the proximity of home, the nation, the earth, blood, filiation, and so on. In order to spirit away the threat, you therefore incorporate it in yourself, by appropriating technology, telecommunications, internet access, the effects of globalization, and so on. A process of self-immunization. It destroys the organism that it thereby seeks to protect. (*Paper Machine* 117)

The immunizing, ethnically or racially inflected desire to secure national boundaries in a number of ways will similarly manifest its violent, auto-immune form. In response to Le Pen's ideal immigration policy which could defend France against threats posed by "non-beneficial" immigration (immigrants considered to threaten homogeneity, social harmony or economic health), Derrida points out that such a filtration cannot be calculated in advance, and must be countered with an affirmation of unpredictability with respect to the *arrivant*. The filtering aim expresses a "fear of being altered by what comes from outside, by the

other" (*Echographies* 19) – a fear which is not only destructive but auto-destructive. Derrida continues with a *countering* and *affirmative* stress on this auto-immunity:

> If it were capable of calculating this filtration in advance, a living organism might achieve immortality, but in order to do so, it would have to die in advance, to let itself die or kill itself in advance, for fear of being altered by what comes from outside, by the other, period. (Ibid. 18–19)

Derrida is quite willing to argue, as does Esposito, that the more extreme the attempts at self-immunization from what is perceived as change, transformation, invasion, the greater the auto-immunity (here in the sense of both destruction and auto-destruction). He continues, in the above passage from *Echographies*:

> Hence the theater of death to which racisms, biologisms, organisms, eugenics are so often given, and sometimes philosophies of life. (19)

At the point Esposito and Derrida mention the phenomenon of an auto-immune eugenics, the projects again seem to come into a kind of proximity, as they describe the theatre of death produced by such attempts at immunitary defense. Both remind us that these attempts will have included reproductive variants: violent or deadly forms of forced sterilization, genocidal rape, eugenic ambitions targeting women's reproductive lives, projects aimed at forestalling or forcibly determining "life" in advance) – as auto-immunity.[20]

## V against big airs – politics and the organicist paradigm

Yet Derrida offers rejoinders which we will not see in the work of Esposito. Both agree about the dangers and violence of preservational and defensive logics. But, and characteristically, Derrida follows the above discussion with a further caution against a certain smugness that might attach to a widespread abhorrence on the left to Le Pen's propositions. For Derrida goes on to say that *anyone* who advocates border controls is complicit with this "organicist axiom," and, more strongly, that

> it is firmly rooted in the political insofar as it is bound up with and as long as it remains bound up with the nation state. (*Echographies* 19)

Derrida's proposal is that all who recoil from Le Pen must nonetheless refrain from putting on "big airs":

> let us underscore again what can't possibly make anyone happy: anyone, whether he is on the left or on the right, who, "like everybody," advocates immigration controls, bans illegal immigration, and would regulate the other, subscribes de facto and de jure, whether he likes it or not, and with varying degrees of elegance or distinction, to Le Pen's organicist axiom, an axiom which is none other than that of a national front. (The front is a skin, a selective "membrane", admitting only the homogenous or the homogenizable, the assimilable, or rather, that which is heterogeneous but considered to be "beneficial": the appropriable immigrant, the immigrant who is clean and proper.) We should not hide our eyes before this undeniable complicity […] And when, like everybody, we have to acknowledge that we have no choice but to try to protect what we think is our inviolate body, when we want to regulate immigration and asylum, we should not put on airs and give lessons in politics […] (Ibid.)

Esposito also recommends against the defensive mechanisms, the attempts to establish filtering membranes to achieve a rigorous defense of (an impossible) internal purity of community. He would also think we must be vigilant when it comes to the ongoing way in which membranes reassert themselves. Yet Esposito does not take pains, in the face of his critique of the immune paradigm, to argue so trenchantly that for all our analyses of its violence and thanatopolitics we cannot hope but to partake in membranes *in the potentially disastrous ways described by Derrida*. We can't entirely immunize ourselves from every way in

which Le Pen would attempt to establish defensive membranes. For his part, Esposito argues for a reconfiguration of community. But the image offered by his work is of a vitalist and above all a *possible* reconfiguration. He does return us to an equivalent of Derrida's reminder that we must always look for, and acknowledge, our membranes, but Derrida's version affirms this necessary permeability *as* potentially terrible. This is not to be quietist or resigned to the monstrous possibilities arising from permeability, but it is to suggest that no political position could be immune from them:

> To acknowledge this permeability, this combinatory and its complicities, is not to take an apolitical position […] On the contrary, it is to appeal to our duty to courageously formulate and thematize this terrible combinatory. (*Echographies* 19–20)

By contrast, Esposito undertakes to offer alternatives for this terrible combinatory – this is a critical point of differentiation between the figures of immunity and auto-immunity in their respective work. For Derrida one would, at best, commit to a politics of perpetual negotiation with a membrane constantly reinstalling itself – sometimes with terrible results, thus this is a recognition and negotiation said to call for "courage." Because for Esposito the most disastrous outcomes are the results of excessive attempts at immunization, an ideal for living with alterity is associated with alternatives that would not attempt radical immunization. Derrida has a rejoinder here, seemingly not shared by Esposito: the results of excessive immunization certainly are disastrous but we *cannot* not immunize. We cannot hope to secure ourselves from the disastrous results of immunization. The liberal cannot hope to secure him or herself from all of Le Pen's presuppositions.

Is it possible that Esposito, identifying the disastrous results of attempts at immunization (on which both agree), hopes, through a countering alternative model, to immunize against them? Derrida's perspective, by contrast, might prefer the emphasis that there can be no such immunization against the excesses of immunization. Yes, the immunizing membrane is a terrible combinatory. Yet no model, from Derrida or Esposito, could immunize against the potentially catastrophic consequences of attempts at self-protection.

One overlapping sense of auto-immunity in their work is the equivalence of total immunity with total annihilation. I suggested that both Esposito and Derrida agree that to be fully immunized would amount to death. Yet both remind us that no one lives without their defensive membranes.[21] So Esposito affirmatively rethinks the immune system as a "diaphragm" or "internal resonance chamber" through which difference "traverses us" (*Immunitas* 18). But Derrida is more inclined to remind us that the *worst* aspects of membranes will also reinstall themselves. A Derridean approach (to human rights claims, to feminism, to nationalism, to ethnocentrism, to racism, humanitarianism) will always provoke the question: where are our membranes? How do they operate? Where do they reassert themselves? At whose expense?

By contrast, Esposito turns to an alternative imaginary, in the sense that it is less infused with Derrida's vigilant wariness with respect to political pretensions to thoroughly transformative politics. *Immunitas* proposes a model of living with alterity in which *communitas* is not *inevitably* exposed to a future which might be terrible. Its exposure to alterity may well (in Derrida's sense) call for "courage," but Esposito does not affirm the inevitability of a potential for monstrosity. It is not, in *Esposito's* sense of the term, inherently nor inevitably auto-immune.

What, then, are the implications for the ways in which birth is represented in the work of the two philosophies of immunity?

## VI birth

Every racism and ethnocentrism is, Derrida argues, regulated by means of defining the "alterity of the foreigner or the barbarian" through discourses on birth (*Politics* 91). In fact, a number of the examples discussed both by Esposito and Derrida (reproductively oriented ethnic rape, forced sterilization or

abortion in the context of eugenics programs) also concern the deployment of women's capacity for birth to ethnocentric ends in biopolitical contexts. Thus to return to Derrida's comment in "Faith and Knowledge," when Derrida discusses the turn of ethnic-religious fundamentalisms to violence, he specifies:

> in the most lethal explosions of a violence that is inevitably ethnico-religious – […] on all sides, women in particular are singled out as victims (not "only" of murders, but also of the rapes and mutilations that precede and accompany them). ("Faith and Knowledge" 49)

Both philosophers identify women, particularly women historically politicized and problematized as reproductive, as profoundly implicated in logics of racist and reproductively inflected immunity. Where Derrida does so directly and explicitly, Esposito's variant is less explicit but emerges in some of the examples discussed in *Bíos*.

And both philosophers turn to the figure of birth for alternative conceptual resources, but as they do so the differences I have discussed here again make themselves felt. In Esposito's case birth provides an alternative image of the mother–fetus relationship and of the new. In Derrida's case birth will provide images of hospitality and democracy to come.[22] Describing radical hospitality, Derrida offers as one figure of the *arrivant* the birth of a child:

> With the birth of a child – the first figure of the absolute arrivant – one can analyze the causalities, the genealogical, genetic, and symbolic premises, or the wedding preparations. But even if such an analysis could ever be completed, one can never reduce the element of chance [*aléa*], the place of the taking-place; there will be someone who speaks, someone irreplaceable, an absolute initiative, another origin of the world. (*Echographies* 20)

Another associated image offered concerns the immigrant, as seen in the reminder offered by Derrida to counter Le Pen:

> The immigration of which France's history is made, the history of its culture, religions and languages, was first a history of these children, children or immigrants or not, who were so many absolute *arrivants*. (Ibid.)

Though Derrida does not, in this reference to the child, discuss the danger posed to the host by the *arrivant* (as Royle notes, the *arrivant* is "hospitality itself" (Royle 111)), he does, in a number of his discussions of hospitality, emphasize the danger constitutively posed by the *arrivant*. In his discussions of unconditional hospitality, he stresses the possibility of one's home being destroyed ("Hospitality" 70–71). He depicts the future, associable with unconditional hospitality to the *arrivant*, as potentially monstrous (Derrida, *Points* 386–87). He establishes the interconnection: hospitality–*arrivant*–possible monstrosity, and separately, *arrivant*–child. As he does so he links together, via their respective association with *arrivance*, the child with the figure of monstrosity, if indirectly.[23]

If, a number of times in Derrida's work, the figures of birth and of the child allow him to evoke indirectly and directly the dilemmas of the impossible hospitality offered to the unknown *arrivant*, how does Esposito, for his part, draw on the fetus and the child, and also on literal and non-literal references to "birth"? How is his mode of doing so emblematic of the divergence between Derrida and Esposito? *Terms of the Political* continues to evoke birth as an emblem of Esposito's definitions of community as an opening towards otherness (44). Community, he writes, is "recalled in every birth" (ibid. 43), and similar references to birth are to be found in *Bíos* and *Immunitas*. But the latter work also includes a more specific reconfiguring of an imaginary for community associated with the mother–fetus relationship in *Immunitas*.[24] Esposito defines community as

> being traversed by a relation with others in such a way that we are altered: by the "with," the "between" and the threshold where [we] meet in a point of contact that brings [us] in contact with others to the degree to which [we] are separated from [our]selves. (*Communitas* 139)

He claims an emblematic importance for the reconfiguration of the mother–fetus relationship, one which could encompass his ideal reconfiguration of the immune paradigm:

> 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 normally should destroy. (*Immunitas* 171)

Rejecting the view of mother and fetus living in a harmonious relationship, or one of homogeneity, Esposito presents alternative images of the fetus and mother as always and necessarily at war with each other. He does not repudiate the view of the mother's body as attempting to reject the fetus, acknowledging that it can be said of the relationship that

> the mother is pitted against the child and the child against the *mother*. (Ibid.)[25]

But he emphasizes that the "spark of life" (ibid.) arises from this conflict. Reconfiguring the "war" and "defense" images of mother–fetus immunity, offering us an image of the fetus as (im)proper to the mother and vice versa, Esposito presents an image of the mother as able to tolerate the fetus, only *insofar* as it is other and heterogeneous. The image of interest to Esposito is the rejection of the fetus by the mother's body if it is genetically too *similar* to the mother. The genetic difference of paternal chromosomes stimulates an immune reaction which in turn stimulates a system of antibodies allowing the mother's body to retain the fetus (moreover, Esposito recalls that the presence of the fetus will in fact be therapeutic for women with autoimmune diseases (ibid.).[26]

This image offers a different means of conceptualizing immunity – it affirms the necessity or productivity of immune responses the absence of which would be catastrophic for life. They become the figure of a cohabitation with difference, an emblem for a different means of thinking about community. This is most literally introduced with a reference to biologists who think of the immune system as an ecosystem or a social community – not just a defensive system, but a system of "self-alteration" (ibid. 169; see also 177).[27]

So, how do the respective references to birth by Esposito and Derrida help us to differentiate their account of immunity?

## VII birth and destruction

Derrida associates the figure of the *arrivant* with birth, and with the child. But he also associates the arrivant with the figure of a radical hospitality, an unpredictable future, and with the possibility of the monstrous. In such contexts, his reminder is that the *arrivant* can potentially do harm, be terrible, or "destroy your house" ("Hospitality" 70–71). Given these associations, the child (the figure, for Derrida, of the *arrivant*) ought to be, and almost is (with the caveat I have mentioned – for the connection is made indirectly), represented as potentially negative, destructive, revolutionary, deadly, monstrous, in unforeseeable ways.

Compare this to Esposito's image of the mother–fetus relationship. As a reconfigured image, it 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 postpartum depression to matricide, or other negative inflections potentially associable with the unpredictable aspects of the fetus and pregnancy. This is not to favor a negative representation of maternity, but to indicate what drops out from both Esposito and (just slightly) even Derrida's version. But in Derrida's case, this is a missing connection in a series of associations already in his work. He does not emphasize the child's capacity to be monstrous for its host, but he does associate the *arrivant* with the child, and, separately, the *arrivant* with the possibility

of monstrosity and destruction of the host. By contrast, Esposito places no particular emphasis on a monstrous *arrivant*. Rather, he favors an affirmative and vitalist account of the constant transformation of an entity's own norm.

This is seen not only in Esposito's account of life in *Bíos* but also in his account in that work of the termination of reproductive life (in the form of eugenically oriented sterilization or murder) as an extreme thanatopolitics, cutting off life in advance. Derrida can answer Esposito here. For Derrida, such images will not serve. Dating back even to *Positions*, on Derrida's account life *must* be understood as having the potential to cut itself off in advance: to be its own thanatopolitics.[28] A number of commentators, including Lee Edelman and W.J.T. Mitchell, have criticized Derrida for a seemingly strange inconsistency in some of his work on auto-immunity. Edelman has argued that a futurism, and possibly a reproductive futurism (to use Edelman's term), reinstalls itself fleetingly in his work ("Against Survival" 161–62). But Derrida's emphasis on monstrosity also offers the resources to counteract that tendency. This means he also offers the resources to challenge Esposito's images (without representation of exceptions) of children as provoking love even in the most thanatopolitical of contexts, as in the genocidal rapes of Rwanda (those mothers figured by Esposito as loving their children, despite the hateful circumstances of their conception (*Bíos* 7)) or in their heterogeneity as also able to promote the health of the mother ("the child's attack can also save the mother from her self-injurious tendencies" (*Immunitas* 171)).

Surely these are, as Derrida has said of the figures of birth, fraternity, and the association of nationality and maternity discussed in *Politics of Friendship*, both metaphors *and* non-metaphors:

> And any time the literality of these implications has been denied, for example by claiming that one was speaking not of the natural and biological family (as if the family was ever purely natural and biological) or that the figure of the brother was merely a symbolic and spiritual figure, it was never explained why one wished to hold on to and privilege this figure rather than that of the sister, the female cousin, the daughter, the wife or the stranger, or the figure of anyone or whoever. (*Politics* 58)

To whatever extent Esposito's images of the mother–fetus favor life (albeit as alternatives intended as a means of offering alternatives to the thanatopolitical variants), they can be similarly challenged. Why present only the image of the good done to the mother by the alterity of the fetus, rather than the concurrent scenario of unpredictable harm which also is possible? If we are offered an image of transformative or even therapeutic self-transformation, through images hovering between the literal and non-literal, why not include more diverse phenomena and diverse outcomes? In particular, what of Derrida's monstrous possibilities?

In sum, Derrida and Esposito agree on the hazards of immunitary defense and of preservational strategies, but offer different responses to the disastrous aspects of immune logics. Esposito turns to an ideal image of community, for which a reconfigured image of the mother–fetus is presented as providing a model, as is the diaphragm allowing difference to traverse us. When he cites an immunological account of the furious attack of the mother's system on the fetus, he does so in reference to its paradoxically allowing, rather than impeding, the fetus's survival, commenting:

> 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 […] 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 […] 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. (*Immunitas* 171)

Exactly where Esposito aspires to a reconfigured immunity allowing an image of community as not necessarily destructive, Derrida will have been at his most cautious. An openness to the exterior is also an openness to destruction. This must be affirmed, not denied, for the very reason both philosophers acknowledge. There can be no life with "full immunity." While this is the condition of life, it also means that defensive membranes *in all their violence*, do re-establish themselves.

We have seen Derrida's suggestion that this needs to be thematized "with courage." My point is not that Esposito rejects this view. He is not far from Derrida in affirming a vigilant attention to the constant re-establishment of defensive membranes. But he 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, auto-destruction, the envelope, differing and deferring, self-limiting, the *à venir*, the ultra-transcendental, the not-taking-place, self-cancellation, and, most broadly, alterity. For Esposito, Derrida's remark that

> no community is possible that would not cultivate its own auto-immunity ("Faith" 51)

could only be a negative identification of a community pushed to the extremes of the immune paradigm. But for Derrida this also has a positive connotation: it is the matter of concurrent affirmation. We cannot live except enfolding exteriority. It is because we are open to disaster that we are open to transformation. But the reverse also must hold. If we are open to transformation, we are open to disaster.

I have argued that this different inflection in Derrida and Esposito manifests in a component of the latter's material little engaged by his commentators,[29] the limited, overly positive and overly "decidable" figures of mothers, pregnancy, and birth in Esposito's work. I have suggested that from a Derridean perspective, Esposito's related, affirmative defense of (reconfigured) community could be seen as a political and philosophical project to *immunize against* the dangers of immunization and auto-immunity. This characterization would similarly be suggested by the comparison with the Derridean model, which would maximally caution against the hope of securing positive alternatives to the dangers of immunization and the unpredictable work of auto-immunity.

## notes

My warmest thanks to Greg Bird, Jonathan Short, and an anonymous reviewer for *Angelaki* for their critical and generous suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

1 See, for example, Timothy Campbell's introduction to his translation of Esposito's *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* ("Bíos, Immunity, Life" vii–xlii); Vanessa Lemm's introduction to her translation of Esposito's *Terms of the Political* ("Biopolitics and Community in Roberto Esposito" 1–13); Amendola 102–18; Haddad 173–93; Wolfe 92ff.

2 In "Faith and Knowledge" Derrida refers to a biological auto-immunization that would seem to give rise to a more general logic:

> It is especially in the domain of biology that the lexical resources of immunity have developed their authority. The immunitary reaction protects the "indemn-ity" 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 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 immune-depressants destined to limit the mechanisms of rejection and to facilitate tolerance of certain organ transplants, we feel ourselves authorized to speak of a sort of general logic of autoimmunization. ("Faith" 73 n. 27)

But Derrida considers auto-immunity not to arise from a biological context that, by analogy, could

then be applied to the political sphere. Rather, "if autoimmunity is physiological, biological, or zoological, *it precedes or anticipates all these oppositions*" (*Rogues* 109; my emphasis). Derrida does not take a biological model and apply it more broadly (e.g., to religion, democracy and ethnocentrism); rather, he develops a way of thinking immunity and argues that it would precede and be presupposed by both a biological and political declension. One can similarly place in context the reference in *Terms of the Political*, where Esposito refers to the biological phenomenon of auto-immunity, likening the way in which the Nazi regime progressively widened its circle of death, "as in so-called autoimmune diseases, where the immune system is strengthened to the point of causing the body's decomposition" (73). For Esposito has also emphasized that "the biological immune is [not] a neutral or original object compared to the derivative or metaphoric nature of other forms of social immunization" (*Immunitas* 16).

3 In what follows, I discuss several versions of the term "auto-immunity" in Derrida's work. In *Immunitas* Esposito refers to Derrida's account of autoimmunity, but only to the version discussed in "Faith and Knowledge" (*Immunitas* 52–56)

4 This is discussed in contexts as varied as the autobiographical impulse, discussed in "The Animal That Therefore I Am," in which immunization through the autobiographical gesture *risks* becoming autoimmune. Commenting that "nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography" (415), Derrida describes "this terrible (*and always possible*) perversion by means of which the immune becomes auto-immunizing," an "immunizing movement that is always *threatened* with becoming auto-immunizing" ("The Animal" 415; emphasis mine), as well as the defense of America's "security" (see below).

5 See also Esposito's discussion of 9/11 in terms of an immunitary crisis (*Terms* 132).

6 See, for example, the account of this as culminating in a global crisis "at the culmination of the biopolitical epoch" (*Terms* 132–33).

7 See Derrida, *Beast* 324.

8 Esposito specifically sees Derrida as "not completely register[ing] or […] reject[ing] the paradigmatic shift toward *bíos* that for some time now has altered the dynamics of knowledge" – this would apply both to the paradigm in which politics is increasingly concerned with the defense of an impossibly immunized life, and the growing epistemological and philosophical importance of theoretical accounts adequate to this phenomenon ("Contemporary French" 112–13).

9 This variant of Derridean auto-immunity emphasizes more strongly the constitutive, as when, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida describes the living ego as auto-immune. It must, he argues, necessarily "welcome the other within." There is no living ego without: "iterability, non-uniqueness, prosthesis, synthetic image, simulacrum," all, he argues, "so many figures of death" (*Specters of Marx* 141). There could not be an ego without the alterity that might seem to be the ego's negation and other. Elsewhere he argues that there could not be life without the immanence of death, and the degradation that appears to be its antithesis.

10 In the 1968 interview with Julia Kristeva in *Positions*, Derrida describes "the conscious and speaking subject" as "not present, nor above all present to itself before *différance*." But, he adds, "the subject is constituted" (but, of course, he continues: "only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral" (*Positions* 29)).

11 Rebentisch associates this account with the conditionality of the liberal tolerance associated with some discourses of multiculturalism. Insofar as we are tolerant of what we tacitly understand to be (sufficiently) like us (insofar as our tolerance is tacitly premised on a degree of likeness), tolerance could be said (according to Rebentisch's reading) to similarly not take place, not to be what it is, to secure itself by restricting itself.

12 See Derrida, *Given Time* and *The Gift of Death*.

13 The latter does not, of course, justify the former, and it would be incorrect, also, to settle these coinciding formulae into a decidable version of democracy either "taking place" or "not taking place." Similarly, just as it is incorrect to suppose Derrida's auto-immunity should be understood as decidably destructive, it is incorrect to assume a decidable distinguishability between its destructive and positive possibilities or effects.

14 See, for example, *Monolinguism* 28, and his comments on cultural identity in *The Other Heading* and also in Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*:

> take the example of a person or of a culture. We often insist nowadays on cultural identity – for instance, national identity, linguistic identity, and so on. Sometimes the struggles under the banner of cultural identity, national identity, linguistic identity are noble fights. But at the same time the people who fight for their identity must pay attention to the fact that identity is not the self-identity of a thing, this glass, for instance, this microphone, but implies a difference within identity. That is, the identity of a culture is a way of being different from itself; a culture is different from itself; the person is different from itself. Once you take into account this inner and other difference, then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity, is open to another identity. And this prevents totalitarianism, nationalism, egocentrism, and so on. That is what I tried to demonstrate in the book called *The Other Heading*: in the case of culture, person, nation, language, identity is a self-differentiating identity, an identity different from itself, having an opening or a gap within itself. (*Deconstruction in a Nutshell* 13–14)

This remark must be counter-balanced, however, by comments made about Le Pen and the membrane; see *Echographies* 19, discussed in section V below.

15 This takes further Foucault's discussion in *Society Must Be Defended* of Hitler's April 1945 order "to destroy the German people's living conditions" (260), but see nn. 16 and 17.

16 There is room for debate about how closely this follows Foucault's account in *Society Must Be Defended* of the caesura introduced by biopolitics into the biological continuum. The break described by Foucault emphasizes the emergence of biological inferiority within a population in the form of divisions between races, sub-species, or "inferior" groups. He describes the emergence of rationales for letting these groups die, or be killed, to the ends of the healthy life of the population. Unlike wars between peoples and nations, he stresses that this is a conceptualization of internal elements *within* a population considered destructive or threatening to the future. Still, he emphasizes: "it is a way of separating out the groups that exist within a population." According to his commentary: "the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer" (255). Esposito, in his reference to the parallels made by Nazi biologists between sterilization, genocide and removing the appendix of the population, inclines his analysis towards the extreme version of the immune paradigm: where self-destruction eventually becomes a means of enhancing "life."

17 It would be just as plausible to argue that some Afghan lives are considered to be collateral damage to the overall "humanitarian ends" of other Afghans or other interests. In other words, Esposito's interpretation can be distinguished, in this emphasis, from that offered by Butler in *Frames of War* and *Precarious Life*, and, I have suggested, from that offered by Foucault in *Society Must Be Defended*.

18 Esposito considers this the extreme logic of the immune paradigm. The element of seeming paradox (though he does not favor this term) is emphasized insofar as he describes the attempt to avoid race "sterility" through mechanisms of "sterilization." The risk of sterility to the Aryan race was attributed to individuals associated with degeneracy or transmittable racial or biological inferiority. But Esposito cites Nazi medical analogies between Jews and the gangrenous appendix of the German *Völkerkörper* and the concepts of racial hygiene and demographic politics of Verschuer who defended a "healthy patrimony [through] the elimination of *its* sick elements" (*Bíos* 143).

19 See Anne O'Byrne's "*Communitas* and the Problem of Women" (this issue), for her discussion of Esposito on the "suppression of birth."

20 At the radical extreme, for Derrida, immunity from the risk of unpredictable transformation could only be accomplished by the most radical stasis: death. Thus any of the attempts to stave off foreignness and difference are bound to fail. They are, therefore, auto-immune, here in the sense of being destructive to their own aspirations.

21 For example, Esposito does acknowledge that "immunity is needed for protecting our life," provided it does not exceed the threshold beyond which it "winds up negating life" (*Terms* 61).

22 See Haddad's *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* for its definitive discussion of the status, and multiple meanings, of birth in Derrida's work.

23 He is comfortable with the direct associations of *arrivance*, future, hospitality and monstrosity, but with some seeming preference for the more oblique association of the child with the monstrous. I add here to the discussion of birth in Derrida's work opened by Haddad, who comments:

> On the one hand, [Derrida] identifies [birth] narrowly with nature and necessity, and this identification grounds his resistance to the use of fraternity in political discourse. Birth understood in this sense is thus marked as negative, since it is said to be at work in a discourse whose force Derrida wishes to diminish. On the other hand, Derrida himself has recourse to birth as a figure for the *arrivant*, as that which comes and exceeds all calculation and determination, precisely in political contexts. Here Derrida imparts a positive value to birth, insofar as he invokes the figure of the child or its substitutes, suggesting he endorses an openness to the arrivant. Derrida's work would thus appear to contain two births, with two meanings and two values. (Haddad, *Derrida* 122–23)

24 Esposito hopes to add an alternative understanding of community, one offered to counteract the excesses of the immune paradigm and their thanatopolitics. By contrast, in a favored modeling of community we would not attempt to thoroughly immunize ourselves (or community) from risk, threat, death, difference, encroachment, transformation. Such attempts only aggravate, in any case, what they attempt to avert. We would not attempt to protect ourselves from this "no-thing" that is the mode of being of community (*Communitas* 139).

25 And similarly, see Esposito's interview with Timothy Campbell and Federico Luisetti, "On Contemporary French and Italian Political Philosophy," in which Esposito again uses an image of the "the internal struggle, which for example, compares and contrasts the fetus's immunitarian system with that of the mother" as an alternative for a biopolitics thought of as a "predetermined thread linking birth to death" (111).

26 Making this point, he draws particularly on a discussion of the fetus and the immune system presented by John Dwyer in *The Body at War*. Anne O'Byrne's contribution to this special issue offers further reflections on Esposito's interpretation of the paternal chromosomes, and of the fetus as a "semi-allogenic implant in the maternal body, preserved there by paternal difference" (O'Byrne this issue).

27 Esposito refers also to Donna Haraway's account of a semi-permeable self, enfolding within its boundaries the alterity of its environment (*Immunitas* 165–66).

28 As late as his *Death Penalty* seminar, Derrida exchanges an articulation of the "right to life" for an account of life *as* the undecidability of one's own death (*Séminaire*; see in particular the tenth session, 331–64).

29 But, for important exceptions, see Haddad, "Citizenship" and (for his treatment of Derrida on birth) idem, *Derrida*; see also O'Byrne's contribution in this special issue of *Angelaki.* In an earlier work, O'Byrne offers an analysis of the figure of birth by a number of contemporary and twentieth-century Continental philosophers, including Derrida; see her *Natality and Finitude*.

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