



Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, editors

[Timothy Campbell](#) is a Professor of Italian in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University and together with Adam Sitze, a professor of Law, Jurisprudence and Social thought at the Amherst College he recently edited a new collection of essays on the topic of biopolitics. Campbell translated Roberto Esposito's *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minnesota, 2008) and *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (Stanford, 2009). He is the author of *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* (Minnesota, 2006), winner of the Media Ecology Association's 2007 Lewis Mumford Award for Outstanding Scholarship in the Ecology of Technics and and *Improper Life: Biopolitics and Technology from Heidegger to Agamben* (Minnesota, 2011). He also edits the series "Commonalities" for Fordham University Press and is currently completing his study of cinema and biopower titled *Grace Notes: Cinema and the Generous Form of Life*.

*Biopolitics: A Reader* published in 2013 collects pivotal texts defining the concept of biopolitics. Opening with Michel Foucault's coining of the term in his 1976 essay "Right of Death and Power over Life" we follow biopolitics through the edited collection as it is anticipated by Hannah Arendt and later altered, critiqued, deconstructed, and refined by major political and social theorists who explicitly engaged with Foucault's ideas.

**Heather Dewey-Hagborg:** What is biopolitics? What was biopolitics (as in, where did the idea come from) and what does biopolitics mean today?

**Timothy Campbell:** Ah, the million-dollar question. When Adam Sitze and I sat down five years ago to sketch the readings we would include in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, we struggled to find a definition that could cover most of the nuances of the term. I'm sure he would agree that if nothing else it was instructive trying to pin down the meaning of biopolitics.

Some of the difficulty is that defining biopolitics already limits where you think the term originates and

what kind of work you want the term to do. And as we point out in the introduction, biopolitics is truly plastic: it morphs just as soon as you think you've got hold of it.

With that said, my preference is to focus on the "is" of your question. What is biopolitics? Clearly, it's a moment, as Arendt, Agamben, and Esposito among others argue, when what the Ancient Greeks called bios, or life, encounters the political, which is how they referred to life in the city or polis. This is important only because of the separation of life as bios from life as life in the polis: bios was domestic life, food, health, the household's budget. In short, it is the moment when life encounters the political, which is what Arendt sketches so profoundly and at length in The Human Condition, portions of which we include in the reader. Let's also remember that politikos did not include slaves nor women.

I want to insist on the word encounter when describing the meeting of life and politics because encounter highlights a relation that isn't — yet — a fusion. I continue to think it important to distinguish between life and politics; that finding an interval to hold open between them may provide us with an opportunity for thought that might otherwise go missing if we immediately assume we know the meaning of biopolitics or biopower. It's one of the principal lessons I took from Esposito's Bios: the way we speak about concepts absolutely matters.

And so to ask about the meaning of biopolitics is really to ask about what happens when life as biological life meets and is enmeshed with political life. No longer is politics primarily about the citizen, political parties, democracy, monarchy, aristocracy, or voting but is increasingly concerned with the health, we might say the well-being, of the polis and its members. This explains today why when some speak of biopolitics, they have in mind the overall welfare of populations, their health, security, and all those facets with which we determine how a particular group is doing biologically, physically, and psychologically. Any politics that is addressed to maintaining the health and well-being, as well as to securing a population is no longer a politics as we generally understand it but is instead biopolitics.

As we write in the introduction, the terrain of biopolitics is contested and so before I go any further, let me add that many of my colleagues would dispute any reading that separates bios from politikos in antiquity. They were hardly as separate as the division as Arendt and others would have us believe. There is a powerful challenge to be sure. For my part I find it helpful to imagine a continuum between bios and politikos: on one side, the biological or the household, and on the other, the political. Moments, events, and decisions can be plotted accordingly.

Two last comments. Usually we don't add prefixes to politics or power. There is the important exception of geopolitics, which as Roberto Esposito shows in his fantastic chapter on the enigma of biopolitics in Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy, was the handiwork of the Swede Rudolph Kjellén, who coined both terms. As helpful as that history is, practically speaking when we talk about politics, there's often no need for a prefix: we know exactly what it means. It's conflict, it's a game, or more simply "It's just politics," by which we refer to the daily irritations that come when working with others on pretty much anything. Politics is the cost that comes with working in and for institutions and of getting something to work. Politics is also shorthand for what doesn't work, as in Congress.

Biopolitics is not that politics. You could never say, for instance, "You know, it's just biopolitics." And the reason you can't is because biopolitics is a term that registers — radically in my view — a new situation, one in which politics is no longer simply about ideology or setting up a position according to

who your friends and enemies are. Biopolitics says that politics today is about the life of human beings judged and evaluated according to their health or potential for health. Securing a population's health over a territory as Michel Foucault might have said. Biopolitics, in other words, is a way of making sense of contemporary trends in politics. The irony is that doing so, the term also seriously undercuts how we generally understand politics.

Second, where before there were many perspectives on the political, today there appear to be a growing number of those of the biopolitical. In other words it's a hotly contested term. So contested that many of late are arguing that it has lost what little use value it may have enjoyed earlier. Others, like my friend Premesh Lalu at the University of the Western Cape, are making a counter-claim, arguing that rather than lessening it, we need to intensify the biopolitical critique. My own sense of where biopolitics squares with Lalu's. Biopolitics can help us make sense of developments that the political cannot, and it does so by acknowledging what we know experientially in our lives. As the political wanes and with it the meaning and power of terms like democracy, citizenry, and voting, biopolitics gives a name to those seismic changes to health, the human, and how power becomes increasingly devoted to biology, to life. That would explain a lot of the resistance to the term.

**HDH:** Your statement "Biopolitics says that politics today is about the life of human beings judged and evaluated according to their health or potential for health" brings eugenics to mind immediately. But it also makes me think that biopolitics is sneakier than that; it isn't just vast government programs and top down state sponsored monitoring but also corporations and cultural norms, as in, the way we monitor and value each other (if you see something say something). How do you view the playing field of what we might call "biopower" in terms of the relevant players, their positions, and perhaps the rules at play?

**TC:** You're right — biopolitics is absolutely sneaky. So much of the difficulty concerns what we mean by health and the norms that have continued to arise around it. The addition of social media to the mix has meant a quicker normalization of what qualifies as health, which your reference to "monitor and value" gestures to.

To pick up the metaphor of the playing field, the players, and the all important rules of the game, we might say that the playing field is of course the body and bodies of both individuals and populations. But it also includes the relation of self (or form of life or subject) inhabiting the bodies to these same bodies. Just as important as the healthy body is the form of life or self that has accomplished or mastered — for now — that healthy body.

Your reference to rules made me think of Wittgenstein's notion of language games. It's become increasingly clear that a popular language game continues to be played around what qualifies as health and recognizing who, precisely, is the "healthy individual." The healthy individual is the one able to master — with the help of a number of apparatuses — his or her body as well as his or her own psyche. Health today is possessed -- is the property of the individual as well as the population— more intensely than at any other time in recent memory.

As with all language games, this game ultimately is all about certainty. The healthy form of life is certain of its health; it is secure in that knowledge. We know that what we're doing (eating, going to the gym, putting on our fitbit) is what is required for us if we are to have our health. In short, health has become

the site where knowledge, certainty, and possession all merge. The growth in the number of apparatuses around health that are normalizing what we understand by it also elide the distance between certainty and security. The opposite is also true — we are certain we know what ails us physically with just a click. Pharmaceutical companies play (and prey) on our need to know for certain that we are healthy and that our health will continue into the future; or equally that our non-health will end.

We are so very interested in possessing health that we often fail to see that the opposite of health isn't illness, given that both health and illness are inscribed in the larger horizon of certainty, security, and ownership. The opposite of health is the state in which one acknowledges the lack of certainty surrounding owning health. I'm not sure what to call this — perhaps it's something as simple as noting that one is alive.

In the language game of health, the principal form of life is the one that holds on to its health as a thing, as a good that belongs to it. The response in the United States to the Ebola virus and especially to those heroic doctors and nurses who traveled to Sierra Leone among other places to help has been interesting. Sometimes, what seemed most troubling for many wasn't that the responders might become sick and spread the disease. Rather it was the doctors and nurses' apparently insane choice to hold their own health less as a possession and more as a gift that did not require a gift in return. The health that involves a gift to a community is one that we have a hard time fathoming today. And that will be the case as long as health is seen primarily through the lens of the individual who merely possesses his or her own health.

**HDH:** How does biopolitics intersect with people's everyday lives? (Why does it matter outside philosophy?) How might we use this concept as a tool?

**TC:** According to Foucault's reading of biopolitics that we locate in the introduction as the concept's near origin, biopolitics intersects with the lives of people through what Foucault calls dispositifs or, as it is often translated in English, as apparatuses. Apparatus pretty much names whatever it is that makes some thing or some one visible. Riffing off of Agamben's reading of apparatus in What is an Apparatus?, apparatus recalls, as Peter Goodrich makes clear in his wonderful essay, "The Theater of Emblems," the French, appareils, to make visible. I would also add that apparatus also names the tools we use to help us perform a task. The apparatus of the book, for example, is its headings, subheadings, footnotes, etc. Taken together, apparatus names both those mechanisms that make visible an object or a person (think the frame of a movie), and that which allows a task to be performed.

What are the apparatuses of biopolitics, or better, of biopower? There are as many as there are ways of making visible subjects, forms, objects, and sites so that biopower can be brought to bear on them. We could speak about the patent as an apparatus, certain technologies (cinema, social media), the person of course, and language itself: techniques, patterns, legal practices whose effect is to make us visible (as a friend on Facebook, as a consumer, as a speaker of a language, and lastly as guilty or innocent). Once made visible, other apparatuses begin to piggyback. A good example was Facebook's attempt to determine the effect that certain kinds of news feeds had on its users. It's the most obvious example but there are many others.

Why does any of this matter? It does because the more we see how biopower works through apparatuses, the more we can decide for ourselves how much we want to contribute to our own visibility and at what price. It's important to remind ourselves that people, let's call them plutocrats for short, own apparatuses and thus are utterly committed to using "their" apparatuses to harvest data in order to make as much profit as possible. If we know some of the disadvantages along with the advantages in becoming the object of an apparatus, we may decide to create a new situation in which counter-apparatus become available.

My sense is that when it comes to apparatuses, what we're really talking about is destiny or fate. Too often though, this is no proper fate, but a fait accompli, as in we are utterly and completely destined to consume. Knowing the role apparatuses play may make our future less a fait accompli than it might otherwise be. We might even choose not to consume. Currently, apparatuses seem to be all about making commodities "appear" as inevitably one's own to the degree we consume them (the distinction between fate and fait accompli was one dear to the British psychologist, [D.W. Winnicott](#)). At the same time, it's hard not to be skeptical. Apparatuses, for as much as they make us visible, don't like the light.

To circle back to biopolitics and how we might use it, Adam and I have a bit of a go in our introduction at all of the inflation surrounding the prefix bio - biopolitics, biometrics, bioart, etc. With that said, biopolitics is different and that's because it is more easily translated into the terms of our daily life than the other terms. One way to translate biopolitics into a practice is to feel the body and to experience the effects of apparatuses on it during the day. Chances are quite good that if your pulse is up, if you've been sitting for hours, if your wrists hurt, and you feel pressure in your head, then you have been made the object of an apparatus. In that sense biopolitics isn't just what captures, but also what stimulates us to discover a sense of the body and what is happening at a specific moment. Biopolitics may well lead to a heightened practice of attention.

**HDH:** Who chose the cover art for [Biopolitics: A Reader](#) and what does it represent for you?

**TC:** The choice of the cover art was instructive. As I recall Adam proposed using Jane Alexander's [The Butcher Boys](#), a choice that blew away the Press (more information on the work can be found [here](#)). It's a powerful, powerful image, which probably explains my initial resistance. Basically, the image made me feel uncomfortable and my fear was that many readers could be put off by it as well. Given the comments I've heard since the reader came out, I obviously do not have my hand on the pulse of potential reading publics!

As for its meaning (and I suspect Adam will have a different interpretation than mine), I always return to the figures themselves. Are they animals or creatures? If they are, are they on their way to being human or were they once human? And what to make of the assorted headgear? It feels like we're looking at a display you would find at a museum or zoo, which heightens my unease and curiosity. It is a deeply (bio)political cover, as if in the initial moment of seeing the image, a future is revealed that doesn't include the human (yet). It does what the best covers do and that is it captures a question or a situation, allowing an interval to open in which what isn't visible begins to push up against what we see or think we see.

**HDH:** What are your thoughts about the recent attention given to the multi and varied programs of mass electronic surveillance, from government to corporate entities? What does biopolitics have to say about this? As our bodies progressively become viewed as data, what do you think it says for the future of biopolitics?

**TC:** Basically, I think that there have been political responses to mass electronic surveillance, but that all have failed and that they have failed precisely because the situation we're facing isn't primarily political but biopolitical. As long as we try to formulate a political response, we're back to fait accompli and tragedy. Maybe it's my American optimism, but I prefer my biopolitics to be comic. And so one response might be to play with surveillance and with the mining of data, so that eventually what the apparatuses capture cannot be said to "belong" to me.

To do that a first step would be to start asking about what surveillance harkens back to. Here what lingers for me is the word collection; the collection of data, stolen data to be sure, but collection nonetheless. What would a collection look like if the data gathered about you isn't yours per se? I can hear the objections; that in order to play there must have been a previous moment in which you have accepted the reality of data collection. But accepting it as reality, doesn't mean giving in to it. And that moment of acceptance that isn't acquiescence hasn't happened yet. The comic as [Kenneth Burke](#) knew so well was accepting but not acquiescing.

Instead the political response has been collective outrage. Outrage never lasts and so what we need is less identification with it. Yes, there needs to be a legal response, and Snowden is absolutely a bona fides hero to me, but in terms of everyday life, I'm more concerned about the surveillance mechanisms that each of us employ on ourselves every day. Maybe what needs to happen is to re-inscribe surveillance in a different register. There's a long history in the 20th century of the avant-garde employing art as a way of accessing their unconscious. The result often enough was that they become less available for the apparatuses of the day. Or think about how Lacan played with radio and television in his interviews. My point is simply that the collection of personal data would be so much less important if we were to give the proper weight to the unconscious and fantasy.

For the most part, biopolitics has been understood as the taking of life or letting live in Foucault's formulation, but as long as we take that as the alpha and omega of biopolitics, then the critique that biopolitics offers can only go so far. We need a more incisive understanding of biopolitics for today. In his later work on the care of the self, the Cynics, and fearless speech, Foucault began to sketch what that might look like. If biopolitics fundamentally involves the appropriation, ownership, and the mastery of data, but also of ourselves and our bodies, then anything that subverts mastery deserves serious consideration as a response.

I want to insist here on the importance of the term, mastery. Mastery has become an important term for me recently. Essentially, it involves the possession of a body, be it of another human being or beings or of knowledge. It's the latter usage that I'm interested in. One is an expert in surgery or an expert in languages. But with the proliferation of apparatuses, the notion of master and mastery has changed. The master is a master thanks to the repetition that he or she is willing to undertake so that mastery will often be measured in the number of repetitions. The master is the priest of repetition. The result is to confuse insight and mastery or for that matter creativity and mastery.

If I can circle back to your earlier question about knowledge and power, I would say that to the degree mastery is once again in the air, it is because it names precisely the site where power, knowledge, and bodies come together. The master is he or she who is able to bring knowledge to bear on a body or bodies and in the act of bringing that knowledge as his or her own, the master exerts power. It's the form of bringing that interests me and here I've found it helpful to think about the act of carrying as involving a relation of the self or form of life or subject to the hand; to the grip that a master may be said to employ. In an astonishing essay titled "The Grip," Lyotard describes the master in Roman antiquity as he or she who grips the hand of the slave and the slave as he or she who is gripped or held. The notion of mastery today includes the grip and the severe, strenuous holding that characterizes so much of our contemporary life. Holding on to an idea, an identity, what one has learned, what one has lived — in some sense we all hope to master our past thanks to these apparatuses so as to hold our future. But mastery across bodies, disciplines, climates, and art is often about one thing only: the mastery of uncertainty, as paradoxical as that may sound.

In lieu of mastery or alongside there is play and true creativity (not the B-School stuff that wants to pass it itself off as creativity). What is needed is getting in touch again with the role of the unconscious and fantasy. To do that we need to find a way to identify less with the data as what we are; perhaps we might even allow ourselves to be dispossessed of the data. What happens then? I don't know, but so much of what we think matters to us is increasingly shown to be about mastery. I'd like to take a pause when it comes to that.

You might ask wonder what dispossession looks like. If possession and mastery involve degrees of holding, with on one side a tight grip and on the other, the open hand, then dispossession marks the progressive relaxing of the grip. I've been working a lot recently on these questions as they relate to the cinematic apparatus, particularly to the films of Michelangelo Antonioni. Without wanting to overstate the case, dispossession is in on display to varying degrees across all his films, but especially in his three films from the early 1960s: *L'avventura*, *La notte*, and especially *L'eclisse*. If those films are about one thing and one thing only, it would be the relation between learning to hold or grasp or grip differently and the kind of life we live. I would go further and say that Antonioni is attempting there to push the spectator to a kind of visual dispossession of what she sees on film.

**HDH:** Can you expand on what you mean about the role of the unconscious and fantasy in creating a biopolitically subversive art form? And/or more generally what role you might see for art in this context ie. creating public awareness, alternate narratives, moments of rupture...?

**TC:** One of my fears about biopower is the seeming ease with which it limits the unconscious and fantasy and their possible response. The disappearance of the unconscious was already registered in Foucault's *\*History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction\**, save for when the subject's unconscious "deploys itself" in the discourse of sex. After that sexuality essentially is seen as what contains the unconscious. Its disappearance continues in many reflections on biopolitics that have appeared since then, where potential often seems to occupy the space that formerly belonged to the unconscious. The result in my view has been a lack of depth when considering the subjects of "the discourse of sex", and, not coincidentally, an easier road to mastery. It's as if what Bergson called the "mechanistic instinct of

the mind” has trumped the unconscious and fantasy. Continuing to paraphrase Bergson’s marvelous pages on the “metaphysician within us,” biopower has given us fixed requirements, ready-made explanations, and irreducible propositions.

Today we believe we are giving space to our fantasies every time we go online or use an app, which makes sense given how many different ways apparatuses allow us to relate to one another and to the world. In an earlier period we would have spoken of different masks for different occasions. Today we have different identities for different apparatuses and the effect hasn’t always been welcome since masks and identifications are not the same. The mask is a usable object that negates, but it negates less than identification does. My fear is that we are witnessing a loss of freedom to affirm a form of life in the move from mask to identity. Said differently: we hold on to identifications more tightly than we do to masks.

If this is the situation we face, then what would a biopolitically subversive art from look like? It seems to me that it would encompass works that subvert biological identification and identity at the level of species and genus. It would involve artists who are willing and able to suspend their possession of what they have created either for themselves and for others. This would be art in which precariousness is foregrounded: the precariousness of play across political and biological forms, where the political and biological rock back and forth between the subjective and the objective. What does a subjective view of biology look like? How does it change if we adopt a traditionally political perspective on it? Where do they intersect?

To take the example of the cover to the Reader once again, Jane Alexander’s Butcher Boys, the installation is biologically motivated to the degree that gendered forms of life are put on display. These ‘boys’ though appear to inhabit a zone of indistinguishability one from another and from other animals that we might recognize and name. A political perspective would in turn highlight the danger of what we see — these are not friends, but enemies who threaten us. These are animals politicized as enemies and enemies biologized as animals. Not coincidentally, Adam and I in the Reader focus much of our attention on the trope of chiasmus. Not surprisingly it’s at the heart of what I consider a biopolitical practice, be it aesthetic or otherwise.

**HDH:** What does biopolitics say about ethics?

**TC:** This may be the toughest question. Adam and I had some great exchanges on whether we were actually proposing a biopolitical ethics or an ethical biopolitics. We opted to leave the question open for the reader.

I will add this. The difference between a biopolitical ethics and an ethical biopolitics resides I think in the weight one chooses to give to ethics. Does one speak of a political ethics and a ethical politics? I’m not sure; at one time perhaps but no longer. It’s just ethics.

The biopolitical is different from political to the degree that there is something already sinister (or to use your modifier) sneaky in it. An ethical biopolitics would seek to draw attention to that quality, highlighting the negative and attempting to use ethics to lessen that sense. A biopolitical ethics for its part would put



the weight on the need for ethics to engage with biopolitical events such as the war on terrorism, but not only. It would also inscribe Foucault's "care of the self" not just within ethics but within a certain kind of ethics that is inflected toward the biopolitical (as Foucault's later work was). As much as I lean toward a biopolitical ethics, it seemed to add greater complexity to an already complex discussion.

If biopolitics asks about the criteria that determine what qualifies as human or as worthy of living, we are then moved to ask what is life today. That's an ethical question. My sense, and I may be completely wrong about this, is that biopolitics of late has put ethics back on the table in ways that it wasn't for cultural studies and before that postmodernism. I have in mind here the case of the American academy where biopolitics as a genre and a discipline has enjoyed and continues to enjoy editorial and intellectual success. But as an aside I would also note how that the Italian social sphere has become a privileged site for bringing ethics to bear on discussions of biopolitics. There's an interesting history that remains to be written about the return of the ethical to conceptions of the political in Italy, from the impolitical stage of twenty years ago to the current apex of biopolitical thought in Italy. Two thinkers in particular come to mind on this score: Franco "Bifo" Berardi and Ida Dominijanni. To remain in the Anglo-American academy, we shouldn't underestimate the importance of Agamben's work in the 2000s on the state of exception and the figure of the homo sacer; if we began asking about what qualifies as life, then we owe no small debt to Agamben for that.

If ethics returns, how does it return? The jury is still out, but my sense is that biopolitics has made us focus on life in ways that some of us had neglected. One of the famous passages from Aristotle we quote near the end of the introduction on the good life as a political life, is one I take seriously (though not too seriously), and so to the degree that biopolitics helps us retrace our steps back to that simple and profound formulation, it's all for the better.

As I said above, I'm an optimist and so I don't necessarily see biopolitics spelling the end of the humanities, to something like an administrative future of zoos, human parks, and more gated communities, in which we continue to live out lives like the inhabitants of the spaceship, Axiom in Wall-E. Ethics in a biopolitical situation will mean aesthetics; play among masks and holding on less tightly to expertise, mastery, knowledge, and ownership.

**HDH:** Is "life" special? As a concept with a history, as enmeshed with power and knowledge and politics?

**TC:** There's a paradox in any answer I might give. On one hand, life can't be that special if we are currently in the midst of the second greatest extinction of life on the planet thanks to our presence. On the other hand, certain forms of life do enjoy the "special" moniker. I don't think we can resolve the paradox - it's enough to observe it for now.

Often what we call special is precisely the kind of life that is seen as belonging to someone; as mine, as the property of me, of you, or ours. So much of what we think is special is because we think it belongs to us or, and this is key, could belong to us. Special is another word for ownership, for appropriating, and so I don't think special has helped much in resisting the current biopolitical event that is mass extinction. Mass ownership, mass extinction.

Is there another way of referring to life that doesn't immediately call forth possession and appropriation? I don't have an answer, but I do know that a lot of the best work on biopolitics today is being done with this question in mind. Can we speak about life without immediately and inevitably describing it as mine or yours? Is this life yours? I do understand the need to locate life as enmeshed with power and knowledge (the Italian philosopher Davide Tarizzo has a great book coming out shortly from Minnesota precisely on this question called [Life, A Recent Invention](#)). Life can be special but only so long as we don't appropriate it, since appropriation often means killing it.

This is not a question of gaining more knowledge about life as data by the way. Even if we "know" what life is and that it is enmeshed in power relations, that knowledge is only helpful up to a point. The reason is simply because knowledge finally is about possession; what I know is what I own. Another French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, changed the question from "What is mine" to "What is." That's the place I often like to start from.

**HDH:** What got you interested in the study of biopolitics? What is your journey?

**TC:** Honestly, I wasn't even remotely interested in biopolitics, pretty much up until a decade ago. Of course I had read Foucault's [History of Sexuality Volume 1](#) while a graduate student, but I didn't give any particular weight to Part III, which is where Foucault introduces the term. Things changed after the publication and translation of Foucault's famous (some might say infamous) 1975-1976 lectures at the College de France, collected in '[Society Must Be Defended.](#)' I remember reading about them in Ann Stoler's work from the 1990s, but nothing prepared me for when they finally did appear. I had the same reaction that I imagine that a lot of people did: not only is this very cool, in the way that most of Foucault's readings are, but I thought that the way he brought biopower to bear on Nazism and socialism seemed to offer a shorthand for why I found so many readings of Italian fascism and of the modern European avant-garde limiting. More important than Foucault's lectures, however, was reading Roberto Esposito's magnificent, [Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy](#) and then translating it. In that book (but not only) Esposito takes huge risks in attempting to think through what he calls an affirmative biopolitics. I also thought that he was onto something truly important in turning our attention to the immunitary apparatus in the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Nietzsche.

You ask about the journey. At some point biopolitics became a personal question for me, linked obscurely to my growing interest in Vipassana Buddhism and meditation. I'm still not quite sure what Buddhism and biopolitics have in common -- my interest in attention in [Improper Life](#) and now in my next book, [Grace Notes](#), derived from my own practice, and so I thought it made sense to try at least to connect biopolitics, understood here as an ensemble of apparatuses, to attention as a kind of counter-apparatus. I don't want to conflate the relation, but it strikes me that attention, mindfulness, or however we might choose to call it, may offer respite from the many apparatuses that work by deflecting attention away from the present, when not stealing it outright. To return to your metaphor — the journey has been away from thought and mastery toward a practice centered both in the body and more recently on aesthetic forms.

Strange no, that biopolitics, what I often associate with the war on terror and racism might also include in its domain something like a power of attention? In my view if there is such a thing as an affirmative biopolitics, it will be found ultimately in the conjunction of ethics and aesthetics. Bringing them together

may offer a response to what seems to be driving so much of contemporary biopower - our incessant and exhausting belief in mastery, knowledge, and possession in all its forms.

**HDH:** In the introduction to the Biopolitics reader you say "not enough time has passed for a complete accounting of biopolitics, biopower, and for their possible genealogies and archaeologies to have been written." Beyond your own text, who else is working on this project? What references would you recommend?

**TC:** There is so much fantastic work being written right now. Italy continues in my mind to be the place for some of the most innovative, only because the political came to end there ten years ago. A whole new generation of scholars are writing in the wake of Agamben, Esposito, and Negri. I mentioned Davide Tarizzo's [Life, A Recent Invention](#), and then there this Simona Forti's wonderful [The New Demons](#), which is just out from Stanford (her essay "[The Biopolitics of Souls](#)" is a tour de force). Staying in Italy, I would also be on the lookout for translations of work by the likes of Ida Dominijanni, Elettra Stimili, and Dario Gentile. More translations of Esposito's work are appearing in 2015. Of special interest is [Categories of the Impolitical](#) in Connal Parsley's elegant translation along with [Two](#), Esposito's response to all the political theologians among us. As I say, Italy continues to be at the center of debates surrounding biopolitics. If your readers can't wait, there was a conference awhile back at Cornell, where I teach. I just discovered that many of the papers and videos from the conference are still up. You can find them [here](#).

Germany too was an important site for work on biopolitics. Lemke, Casper and Moore's [Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction](#) is definitely a great place to go after [Biopolitics: A Reader](#). And I certainly want to urge everyone to track down Peter Sloterdijk's brilliant and problematic essay, "[Rules for the Human Zoo](#)," which finally appeared in translation in [EPD: Society and Space](#) three years ago.

Closer to home, there's a terrific volume of new work on biopolitics that's appearing shortly from the University of Chicago Press. Titled [Biopower: Michel Foucault and Beyond](#), the editors, Nicolae Morar and Vernon Cisney, have assembled a great volume of new thinking around biopolitics. Melinda Cooper's work [Life as Surplus](#) is a truly great work that merits the widest possible readership. Cary Wolfe, the editor of the [Posthumanities](#) series at the University of Minnesota Press, has written important and penetrating essays on biopolitics and animal studies. I would also keep my eye out for a funny and adventurous read that's forthcoming from Stanford: Jeffrey T. Nealon's [Plant Theory](#).