

The Life Strike

Disobeying Borders in the Era of Surveillance Biotechnologies

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ABSTRACT This article examines the forms of disobedience practiced by migrants at the European border to circumvent biotechnological modes of surveillance and identification, which are rooted in involuntary movements that can be used as evidence against migrants. What actually happens when bodily growth, heart rate, respiration, and body heat are integrated into technologies for the detection of life with a view to their measurement (biometrics) and the constitution of a database needed for border surveillance? What happens when life is turned against itself? How to disobey when the involuntary dimensions of the body—not only one’s appearance but the body’s very organicity and biochemistry—become the sites of a surveillance from which one can only escape by holding one’s breath or burning one’s fingerprints? This essay asks how the emerging tactics of migrants seek to escape their interior, organic lives, and identifies the “life strike” as a form of *thanato-mimesis* that consists in playing dead and limiting what in organic life is recognizable as such in order to go unnoticed and to interrupt racial interpellations.

KEYWORDS migration, disobedience, surveillance biotechnologies, biopolitical borders, racialization

“If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank exclusively for itself . . . then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine.”¹ Henry David Thoreau formulates this call for disobedience and argues that we must never stop asking who or what sustains our freedom, whether other living beings or prosthetic machines. But what to do when, as an “irregular” migrant, one only has the low-tech use of one’s body to stop the machines that seek to detect one’s illegal movements? How to resist when “your life” and “the machine” blur together, and all you have are your bones, muscles, skin, and breath to bypass the engineering and sophistication of “smart” biotechnological machines grafted onto the living, machines whose mission is to declare who is authorized to pass?

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There is a remarkable disproportion between, on the one hand, biotechnological and medico-military investment in European borders (equipped with high-tech infrared, thermal cameras, drones, radars, cardiac and CO₂ detectors, but also with bone, hair, dental, and genital tests carried out through X-rays as in forensic medicine), and, on the other hand, the relatively impoverished technologies available to asylum seekers, despite their smartphones and occasional access to GPS.

The biotechnological equipment of biopolitical borders is not simply located in hotspots— not simply used to detect fraudulent passengers on trucks and boats crossing the Franco-Italian, Calais, or even Hungarian-Serbian borders— but is also found in the set of scattered places where control over life is required for confirmation of identity. This is the case in France, where courts request bone tests for the authentication of declarations of minority status for isolated or unaccompanied foreign minors. This article will focus on the meaning of the biopoliticization of borders and especially on the modes of resistance developed by migrants themselves (and not by civil society in solidarity with migrants) in the face of technological surveillance devices deployed at the borders of the European Union since 1995, when the Schengen Agreement was implemented. Since then, borderization has accelerated and intensified with the close cooperation of border surveillance services targeting non-European citizens, especially since the Dublin Regulation in 2003, which laid the groundwork for the Dublin System in 2013 as well as for the Eurodac (European Dactyloscopy) Regulation, which established a fingerprint database. These all relate to the centrality of the biometric identification of asylum-seeking migrants, used to determine which EU country is responsible for examining an asylum application. If migrants are already in the database, they can be returned against their will to the first country in which they arrived. Their fingerprinting therefore indexes their assignment to the European country of arrival for the asylum application. Migrants' resistance to their "Dublinization" is thus part of a strategy to bypass these biomonitoring devices and therefore aims at disidentification, the separation from one's body of all that might indicate *who* one is (in particular by burning one's own identity documents). But biometric disidentification takes different forms, related to the "falsification" not only of one's own documents, but also—and this is the central point of this article— of migrants' appearances, of their bodily surfaces and their organic interiorities, often supposed to be impervious to lies and falsification.² This is a form not so much of disidentification (preventing others from knowing *who* I am) understood in the sense of getting rid of any papers indicating nationality, geographical origin, surname, first name, and date and place of birth, but a form of *devitalization*, a way of turning life against itself, of aiming to forestall the claim that there *is* life, and a certain type of undesirable life, and of preventing the determination of *what* I am.

We must therefore read these strategies for becoming anonymous as continuous with those that seem to lead to simple self-destruction: burning one's papers, burning one's fingers, or burning one's camp, as happened in Moria, Greece. These fall under the same form of resistance as the negation of one's life. The notion of strategies for bypassing detection thus refers to the way in which resistances are deployed not externally and directly against surveillance systems, which become difficult to avoid in the context described above, but rather *internally*, by tampering with and disguising the body, making it go unnoticed. The question then arises as to whether these strategies correspond to a precise phenomenological field: that of invisibility as a bypassing of the visible, or of the visibility of political mobilization, which would be the real site of political subjectivation. My response will demonstrate that, contrary to Roberto Esposito's analysis,³ the notion of autoimmunity, according to which life is turned against itself to defend itself, far from being a contradictory form of subjectivation and *communitas*, prefigures their most extreme formulation. I will therefore insist first on a description of the necropolitical processes of biomonitoring, understood, following Achille Mbembe, as the use of devices for tracking undesirable life on "battlegrounds [that] are not only located at the surface of the earth,"⁴ or, we should add, on the surface of bodies. These biomonitoring devices declare an infrastructural war of a new kind against undesirable life, since the infrastructure in question is that of living organisms. We can even hypothesize that this apparatus hunts down not only the enemy within the nation, but the interiority of the enemy itself.

Against this racial necropolitics, which makes the bodies of living foreigners and their involuntary internal movements the very sites of the evidence against them, it is important to reflect on the way in which forms of political survival are anchored in thanato-political resistance.⁵ These take the site of medical and military-legal *targeting* as a fulcrum of disobedience, such that we can speak of *disobedience at the limit of life*. Here the tactics of resistance take the form of a life strike or a self strike, that is, a partial or temporary suspension of life itself in an effort to escape control over life as a prerequisite for controlling identity. The rudimentary hacking of life thus involves bodily techniques such as the hunger strike, holding one's breath, burning one's fingertips, sewing the mouth or the eyelids shut. Against racial biologization,⁶ which proceeds by quantifying living organisms, where a vital trace is detected and colored by digital imaging in response to exhalation, palpitation, or growth, migrants can thus make their bodies into machines. However, it would be wrong simply to contrast the hypermodernity of surveillance biotechnologies with the simplicity, even archaism, of the techniques of the self in migration. For example, in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco, so-called "sub-Saharan" migrants are, for their part, confined to trying at night to climb,⁷ like sci-fi heroes or Spider-Man, the seven-

meter-high wall that separates the North African forests from Spain. Here, futurism (which borrows heavily from the imagination of science fiction) and archaism form a *chiasmus*, a sort of hybrid couple: futurism is not necessarily on the side of high-surveillance technologies, feats of surveillance engineering; nor should archaism be seen only as a matter of migrants' rudimentary techniques of resistance. It turns out that surveillance technologies in their very sophistication, and in their implantation in the living, stem from an archaic imaginary of stalking, in a form of instinctual primitivism that falls within the logic of hunting.⁸ And conversely, the low-tech character of migrants' bodily equipment does not prevent them from becoming part of a fictional hypermodernity, where camouflage techniques borrow from sophisticated biomimetic or even *thanato-mimetic* forms of camouflage. Biomimicry consists of drawing inspiration from living processes in nature to produce high-definition technologies.⁹ It also refers to bodily and muscular techniques inspired by gestures or mechanisms found in nature, as in the spiders' gestures used to climb border walls, or the movement of reptiles that inspire passages under barbed wire fences. But the art of resisting that I will discuss here is inspired more by what I call *thanato-mimesis*, that is, *the art of playing dead* or disappearing by suspending or constraining the involuntary movement and growth of life in bodies.

1. Border Surveillance and Biotechnology

Borders are the best-guarded things in the world and are the object of unparalleled technological and human investment, to such an extent that they have become "smart" and mobile, that is to say, capable of adapting to the mobility of individuals in order to follow them, tracing their routes, using carnal and vital markers such as heart rate or fingerprints, and verifying their identities almost in real time. The tracking of mobile life is impressive: it involves chip readers (in visas and residence documents), radars, and biometric cameras (using thermal and facial recognition technologies) linked to databases such as, in Europe, the Schengen Information System, the Visa Information Service, and the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database. Thus technological innovations (thermal cameras capable of covering an area of five kilometers, electrified fields, video surveillance technologies penetrating the interiors of bodies) attest to the mobility and dispersion of the border.¹⁰ Thus "the anachronistic vestige of the national border from the analogue age is transformed into a geomedial information system in the digital age."¹¹

For example, there were nearly four hundred surveillance cameras at the end of 2015 on the motorway leading to the Channel Tunnel in Calais, France, to monitor the passage of trucks at the border and prevent the passage of any "stowaways." The border police at the port of Calais were equipped with more efficient scanners than those installed in 2002. A rail security officer at the port explained to journal-

ists: “The image is clearer: if a migrant is in hiding behind a metal plate, for example, we will be able to detect it. The scanner manages to penetrate the truck much more. . . . If we see a suspicious shape in the images, we warn colleagues of the CO₂, and they will in turn check the truck and verify, depending on the level of CO₂ taken, whether there is anyone inside.”¹²

These intelligent devices put in place to manage migratory flows are incorporated into professional security and citizen vigilance policies intended to detect “individuals at risk” often confused with the solitary figures of “fraudulent” migrants. For example, in Belgium, the Westkust police zone (Koksijde, De Panne, and Nieuport) has deployed an infrared camera system to “fight against human trafficking.”¹³ “Smart” borders are formed on the technological basis of a detection and filtering system operating on several physical and virtual sites located not only at the physical border, but also remotely and upstream in the country of emigration, by projecting the border on the targeted body. They are based on what of the visible remains hidden and escapes the eye. The internalization of surveillance reports literally refers to scanning, to visual dissection, and realizes the fantasy of gaining *deep visibility of the body’s interior parts without vivisection*.

The border is no longer regarded only as a material, exterior, and tangible thing, but as incorporated in border guards’ amplified vision, which manages to dissect bodies in motion through digital devices. It is interesting to note the coexistence of technological sophistication linked to the miniaturization of technologies of remote control and government (including drones, but also fingerprint sensors and in general all the sensors that seek out vital traces, which are digitally encoded) and living bodies reduced to the vitality of the organs by which they are composed (which escape the domain of the will). The futuristic perspective—here diverted from science fiction—consists in understanding that the capture of bodies in movement is at once, and paradoxically, a racializing technological codification and a biologization and naturalization of race.

Biotechnologies are grafted not only onto received notions of phenotype and therefore facial recognition technologies, but also onto the interiority of the organism, so that these forms of technological modernity no longer even make a distinction between body and mind, between the machine and the living body, or between the animal and the human. In this sense, the more migrants manifest involuntary signs of being alive, the more they are detectable: the quanta of life (bones, hair, genital size, heart rate, the amount of CO₂ exhaled, the amount of heat emanating) become intensities detectable on a scale. For example, the principle of a thermal camera is to measure and record the various heat waves, or infrared radiations, emanated by a body. Such a camera produces an image representing the intensity of radiation, which makes it possible to assess temperature, an index of the body’s production of energy. In fact, the higher the body’s temperature, the

greater the amount radiation. Technology thus makes it possible to create a spatial mapping of temperatures, called a thermograph since it applies a color (from blue to red) to each temperature and indicates the latter in both Celsius and Fahrenheit. Equipped with sensors, the camera captures infrared radiation and converts the data received into a colored representation of the environment. These digital images are marked by a “latency” in the sense that they are at once the site of the elaboration of a visual unconscious¹⁴ (a framework for representing and distancing the bodies of fleeing migrants) and the material expression of a racial melancholy, since the conventional settings of digital imaging (with its vivid, unrealistic colors) displace skin color as the central criterion for distinguishing between a “us” and a “them.” In other words, these images give rise to a new ghostly theater, encoding the mobility and dynamism of living things in saturations of color and erasures of distinctive phenotypic traits. Forensic radiography adds to this spectral production its tendency to reproduce the frame of life—the skeleton—like a fossil.

The Skeleton as Incriminating Evidence: Beneath Appearances?

In the bone tests carried out to authenticate the age of unaccompanied foreign migrants, the body is made to incriminate itself. Here the discourse of bones takes on a different meaning from the kind of confession analyzed by Foucault in his analysis of regimes of truth¹⁵—because the skeleton is supposed to speak the truth *against* the subject whose speech alone is endowed with the “power of the false.”¹⁶ The skeleton is thus characterized by its *inability to lie*. In the certifications provided by X-rays of the skeleton (wrists and left hand, clavicles, teeth) ordered by the courts to help determine the “real” age of minors, the presupposition is that the body, with its involuntary movements and features, cannot lie. It is interesting to note that this presupposition is shared with psychoanalysis, which also presupposes the impossibility of lying, of complete camouflage, and the fact that the body expresses itself against itself (that is, against its will), giving voice to the truth of its being. In the case of migrants, such being is reduced to the simple fact of a being-there below the subject’s intention. What is disturbing is this belief in the justice of a technological (radiographic) truth and in a truth that belongs to the skeletal and biological body and that can even, in the case of X-rays, supplant the opinions of medical experts, since many agree these X-rays are unreliable. Ignoring Article 388 of the French Civil Code,¹⁷ some juvenile judges order bone tests on the pretext that a migrant’s stated age is not probable, even when the migrant’s identity documents are considered genuine.

What meaning can be found in this suspicion? It is no longer the absence of documents that characterizes “undocumented” migrants; rather, it seems that civil status documents are all the more under suspicion of fraud and falsification when it comes to minors. Hence the relatively obsolete nature of the term “undoc-

umented” (*sans-papiers*), which no longer makes sense for migration administrators, since the papers submitted by exiles now have to be validated by other papers, which themselves must be validated by a medical examination of the body, according to the protocols of an *anatomo-politics* where the truth resides in the deaf noise of the organs. This is what Annalisa Lendaro calls a “biologization of the truth.”¹⁸ By way of illustration, I note that X-rays of the left hand and wrist are taken to assess the existence and size of the ossification point (sesamoid bone of the thumb) and signs of epiphyseal maturation of the phalanges. Odontological X-rays of the jaws, on the other hand, seek to detect the eruption of the third molar (“wisdom tooth”), which occurs around the age of eighteen.

In this kind of judgment of appearances, what happens to forms of phenomenological racism based on phenotype and appearance in general? Is this racism really suspended in this new regime of the biologization of truth? What is replayed in this scene, with its judicial and truth-telling logic, is a biologization of race, linked to an overdetermination of physical appearances, where the inside of the body becomes a new scene of appearance. In the context of migration policies, racialization consists in relating physical, intellectual, moral, or aesthetic characteristics and aptitudes in individuals (migrants) to actual or supposed group membership, resulting in the loss of a claim to administrative viability (a residence permit, a pass, a right to housing and education for unaccompanied foreign minors). This form of racialization is expressed in a denial of phenotypic singularity and in the migrant’s assignment to a homogeneous population, considered to be the same as an extended family.¹⁹ Like bone X-rays, organic interiority detection technologies (including the Jetson heartbeat detector) are also justified by an ostensible defect in facial recognition systems, which fail to detect the singularity of nonwhite faces.²⁰ These technologies are thus based on the ordinary phenotypic prejudice according to which so-called people of color (“Asians” and “Blacks,” in particular) all look alike and only the singularity of a heartbeat, for example, can perfect the detection of an individual who will have been identified elsewhere and registered in the database.

But above all, the congruence between the biologization of race and phenomenological racism is attested in this way: despite the technological sophistication of the bone tests, and despite forensic expertise, appearance-based judgments remain common.²¹ As such, it is the status of expert assessments that is called into question when they are called upon to draw up diagnoses that are guided by *prima facie* judgments. The assessments of the experts are thus *useful in their very uselessness, indispensable because they are dispensable*. Indeed, one resorts to them, as in any discourse of “truth,” in order to achieve closure, to foreclose judgment and therefore debate by attributing to the order of the facts, which is supposedly undeniable, what is actually a value judgment. The implicit request involved in a judge’s

order is not so much to confirm or deny the petitioner's age according to the technology and medical knowledge on offer, but to confirm the ordinary perception based on appearances. In other words, the request formulated implicitly in bone tests supposedly meant to address the deep, biological truth (interior and allegedly irrefutable) is in fact meant to confirm *the truth of appearances*. The interior, organic truth is thus overdetermined by exteriority, although the aim of the new biologization of truth is to protect itself from the contamination of the latter and from the charge of falsehood that can follow from relying only on appearances. The idea of a hierarchy in the veridictional capacity of the organs (certain organs being bearers of authentication, for example, the bones of the wrist, or the hand rather than the hip bones) gives way to a knowledge that cancels out the truth-telling power attributed to the internal organs. In the classic Platonic dialectic, appearances are regarded as misleading, passing themselves off as the original reality rather than the derivatives they are. In the bone tests, however, this dialectic is reversed: what appears in court documents and other public records to be a mistrust of appearances actually participates in a ratification or a reontologization of appearances, treated against all odds as the ultimate proof against deception. If the wrist or the clavicle, that is, parts of organic nature, cannot deceive because they are not subject to voluntary control, then the appearance of the petitioner claiming to be a minor cannot escape the judgment and control of the judge who "knows" how to interpret the external somatic signs of adulthood.

The doubt cast on the age of young foreign migrants on the grounds that, given their appearances, their claim to be minors is "implausible" can be compared to the suspicion about sex when the body does not conform in its external manifestations to the idea of what a man or a woman should be.²² Although bone tests have been illegal in France since the passage of law no. 2016-297 on March 14, 2016, they are nevertheless increasingly used in the examinations meant to determine the pubertal development of primary and secondary sex characteristics (the growth of body hair and genital development). For men, this means determining "testicular volume"; being a man of a certain age, adult or minor, means having a certain amount of body hair and testicular volume. In other words, age has to be inferred from the normative ideal of organic masculinity, that is, from the observation of the salience of the external genitalia and of the testosterone level assumed to be consistent with the age of puberty. Adulthood or minority status is decided on the basis of bone, hair, and genital volume; these three elements form a nexus that repeats and at the same time enacts the normativity of the gender-conforming ideal of masculine development. These devices for authenticating age, defined in terms that range from skeletal growth to "dental age" to "age of puberty," are in fact based on vocabularies that are racially biased from both an ethno-racial and a socioeconomic point of view, since, for instance, the skeletal photographs used

in forensic technology are compared to those of the American population of “Caucasian origin” described in the 1930s in the so-called Greulich and Pyle atlas,²³ or those of the presumably middle-class British population of the 1950s according to the method devised by James Mourilyan Tanner and Richard Henry Whitehouse.²⁴ If we add to this that the two sets of vocabularies were initially developed to diagnose pathologies in childhood development, and that they also have a margin of error of about eighteen months for people between fifteen and eighteen years of age, we see that the insistence on recourse to bone tests in France can only be understood as participating in a biological reproduction of race and sex at the judicial level. Through the pathologization of asylum applicants, those thought to be falsifying their claims to protection as minors are often evaluated on the basis of an ideal of what constitutes a proper, wealthy, white male or female underage child.

The recurrent denial of minority status and the pervasive suspicion of age fraud intensifies a logic subtending the biologization of race, insofar as the relevant populations (mostly Africans) are apprehended by the courts and security forces through a *methodological infantilism*: that is, through a propensity to deny childhood, including in its biological dimension, to these others and at the same time to grant them a delinquent or criminal maturity that makes them eligible for punishment. Conversely, members of African populations are often identified within a racializing discourse as eternal children, thus regarded as incapable of being adults and attentive parents. Resorting to skeletal X-rays to obtain “the truth” about the migrant subject reinforces the logic of both infantilization and family separation, since the “isolated” and “unaccompanied” foreign minor is both detained for being a child without family per se and regarded as a resourceful person who has grown up alone and therefore does not require legal protection. The very fact of being “unaccompanied” or “isolated” appears in administrative language to verify a racial prejudice concerning African families in particular, regarded as incapable of taking care of their children, who are carelessly sent out on the perilous routes of exile. This suspicion of non-European family arrangements is such that DNA tests are requested to prove the real kinship between people applying in applications for family reunification in France. From an administrative point of view, the “good family” is considered above all as deriving from biological parenthood to the detriment of all other forms of family organization (in particular those formed during the migratory journey). Therefore, the bone, dental, hair, testicular, and menstrual tests that are supposed to determine minority status or adulthood actually participate in the policy of promulgating civilizational difference.

According to that scheme, what is ultimately judged is the right to childhood, understood not as a fundamental universal right (a human right) but rather as a *national* right to childhood, a right that the foreigner can claim only by passing the equivalent of a naturalization test. Suitability for European civilization has to

be certified by demonstrating the validity of the internal organs and their capacity to correspond to European norms defining healthy juvenile bodies. The determination of chronological age (the time elapsed between birth and the petition date) and biological age (the state of aging of an individual) required by the courts in France replays the normative moment of birth as described by Judith Butler, with all its attendant tragedy:²⁵ the radiographic verdict that is the diagnosis does not say “it’s a girl” or “it’s a boy” but rather “it’s a minor,” provided that the subject displays the biological characteristics of organic development specific to its pubertal age consistent with its assigned sex. The difference between this utterance and the performative that declares sex at birth is that the implicit evaluation of the claimed date of birth is pronounced by a forensic doctor whose primary task is to perform autopsies on corpses and genetically identify individuals disfigured in the course of accidents or assaults. The symbolic violence done to these “pretenders” to childhood status is wielded by a doctor who usually operates on postmortem bodies. These bodies thus temporarily lose their status as living bodies when they are treated like corpses by forensic doctors, who look for “traces” or “clues.” Thus without being faced with clinical death, what forensic medicine produces—and what motivates the turn to it—is a new type of death that is characterized by the patient’s inability to speak other than through the organs. This is a sort of linguistic death or an attempt to put the linguistic subject to death. As such, the doctor’s interpellation—“it is a minor” or “it is not a minor”—either revives the subject or on the contrary signals its administrative death, in the sense of denying the protections afforded to children.

The statement—“it is a minor” or “it is not a minor”—consists in a performative reiteration of the law, which proceeds by denial in the Freudian sense. Indeed, it is notable that the bone tests that are supposed to confirm minority status are presented in large part in the context of legal arguments that seek to determine the validity of a prior certification (the asylum seeker’s testimony or the “voiceless” birth certificate from the native country). As such, the confirming judgment can only, paradoxically, be expressed in the form of a negative statement: “Mr. or Mrs. . . . is *not* a minor.” Here the grammatical negation involves the affirmation of an anthropological difference because the denial of minority status, which goes hand in hand with the *prohibition on minority status* at work in methodological infantilism, is the administrative expression of the refusal of humanity, both the asylum seeker’s and that of the one who pronounces the judgment. The humanitarian injunction to bring relief to women and children is often considered a moral imperative for anyone human, so that one way of refusing hospitality involves pointing out that migrants are predominantly male adults, sometimes “disguised as women,” and that those claiming to be children are not really children but rather adult impostors. Thus, refusing minority status to migrants who have claimed it

is but one way to refuse the duty of humanity and hospitality. Hence the concern implicitly expressed by judges to morally exonerate themselves when they decide not to be welcoming and to refuse humanitarian imperatives: this is facilitated by the routine, instrumental, and technological procedures that focus only on set physical features, where no *voluntary* intervention by the migrant plays a role.

The notion of the involuntary reappears in another form in this quest for biological proof, at the very heart of what is most specific to the tribunal, in the realm of justice and judgment. The frequent, almost obsessive, recourse to biological tests seeks to abolish judgment itself, and therefore what makes a decision human. As such, the use of radiographic measuring instruments is consistent with the biotechnologies of surveillance at the borders located at the edges of sovereign territories, since in many courts truth and justice are located in the involuntary expressions of the body and in the relative suspension of voluntary judgment. The irony is that neither the migrant youth who claims minority status nor the judge who determines the validity of the claim can seek recourse to what is voluntary. The facts speak for themselves as long as the facts are established by these surveillance techniques.

Soundless Life and the Biologization of Race

In this way, life is reduced to the activity of its organs for administrative purposes, where the survival of a petitioner is at stake, as in the granting or refusal of free passage, or the determination of rights of residence and protection. This reduction participates in a somatization of race, by metonymizing the subject tracked down, and identifying the subject's being with one of its parts: heart, testicles, hand, wrist, clavicle, teeth, breath, body temperature, or hair. A part of the growing body is invested with an administrative meaning that is supposed to derive from a simple, natural, biological reading, but this understanding of "reading" follows from a rejection of the idea that there could be a social and normative predetermination of this biological nature. Conversely, the lie is both biologized and reduced to a cultural pathology, proper to Africans in particular, who are held to be compulsive liars, above all in an outdated medical literature that continues to pervade the colonial imaginary.²⁶ However, unlike the "Algiers School" of psychiatry in the 1930s, which maintained that Algerians' "defects," including their innate tendency to lie, could be read in the supposed involution of their prefrontal lobes, today the biologization of race depends on the presupposition that the organ has a veridictional capacity that seeks to disavow the impostor subject and thwart his fraudulent intentions. In other words, biology is no longer called on to check the organs for a civilizational defect already established elsewhere, but is called on to testify against the subject himself.

In this sense, genetic coding and vital functions are pathologized and criminalized in an unprecedented way: not because migrants can be accused of breath-

ing, growing up, and feeding themselves at the expense of the host country, but because, on the contrary, these vital activities are encouraged, solicited by the border patrol or “migrant hunters”²⁷ to attest to the presence of an undesirable agent at the border. This is the paradox of the “fraud hunt” that *desires* what it seeks to capture, for otherwise it would not seek to seize it. Hence, we detect a certain enjoyment on the part of the hunter in descriptions of artificial intelligence used for surveillance devices, which become appendages of a self whose technical feats, thus detailed, reinforce a feeling of virile performance, of self-fulfillment, a *jouissance* unlimited in space and time. Hence the attention paid to long-range equipment (the extension of target range up to thirty kilometers for thermal cameras and even more for drones with automatic piloting). The very fact that a border guard can keep that distance while surveilling is considered an enhancement of safety and the efficiency of detection operations (with the mobility of the tools responding to migratory mobility, whether the movements of boats or those of migrants on foot). But it is also a matter of the spectacle of spotting and detection.²⁸ This technology makes it possible for guards to see at night or inside trucks, or behind metal plates without having to move them. We are thus witnessing a redefinition of military virility through the regular use of these so-called intelligent and remote surveillance technologies, which dispense with muscle contraction, combat, and confrontation. This virility can in fact be enjoyed by nonsoldiers, nonprofessional combatants, amateurs, geeks, and the aficionados of new surveillance technologies built for use within a life-size game.²⁹

This fantasy of seeing at a distance and in darkness is inseparable from the ability to penetrate bodies in depth, to see into them, into their insides, more than what their owners can see. There might be a kind of *jouissance* here too, a pleasure associated with exceeding (or surpassing) sensory faculties, since the “prosthetic” machine can penetrate bodies without being noticed and without piercing the flesh through the use of simple techniques involving color contrasting and the recording of vital statistics. This technological voyeurism (the enjoyment of seeing without being seen and thus catching “fraudsters” in the act of passing) is fueled by the possibility of seeing the living interior of bodies, devoid of their capacities for intentional response. What is tracked and enjoyed by security agents in the deployment of surveillance biotechnologies is precisely the impossibility of anyone’s committing *vital fraud*, or suspending life. The *jouissance* is enhanced in the biological, spatial, and existential *encircling* of the migrant bodies that betray themselves as they persist in life and express external and internal signs of vitality (whether breath, heat, or pulse).

“Life in the silence of the organs,”³⁰ in René Leriche’s phrase, is supposed to characterize health. It is precisely this dense silence that is being hunted down. It is not necessary for a body to make a sound in order for it to be loud. Heartbeats, like other vital signs, are in fact impossible to silence, since they emit life signals inaudi-

ble to the unaided human ear. Life thus reduced to beats, pulsations—meaningless life—is characterized by the regular emission of vital signals. Giorgio Agamben calls life deprived of human form, reduced to its biological functions for the purposes of political regulation, “bare life.”³¹ But here it is not as such nudity that is disclosed by the exercise of neoliberal sovereignty, but rather an organic, vegetative, and animal life preceding and conditioning all viable life. This is at the same time the object of a political technique (the science of the police and the army) and the object of a technology of the self arising from a care for the self. It is certainly true that Aristotelian *zoe* also associates the primary and common functions of human life with animal and vegetative life, but the meaning that the biotechnologies of border surveillance give to *zoe* is not only the result of a sovereign decision and does not result from a process of dispossession, but rather from the exercise of a dispersed intelligence (without an immediately identifiable central agent), against which the targeted subject must defend itself. If surveillance biotechnologies thus track down life in its vegetative and biological forms, grafting themselves onto it, then how can hunted migrants defend themselves against this xenograft? By insisting that the life strike is a form of autoimmune resistance to surveillance biotechnologies, I aim to include these strategies in the theoretical account of the autonomy of migration, where this latter is not understood simply through the prism of security and/or the economy, but is apprehended as a vital and social movement and a source of political inventions.³²

2. Thanato-Mimesis: “Playing Dead” to Stay Alive

From Thanatosis as Survival Reflex to Thanato-Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance

The simulacrum of death, or thanatosis, refers in the first place to a phenomenon observed in animals, in particular in birds and insects (cicadas, spiders, butterflies, scorpions, and so forth). It consists in simulating appearances for survival in dangerous situations, where the targeted animal can neither flee nor counterattack, or in predatory situations in which the predatory animal is spared a hunt by trapping his prey. Thanatosis relies on the function of appearance in these animals, a function that consists of camouflaging, of becoming relatively invisible, whether for defense or predation purposes, by diverting the attention of the targeted (or observed) animal.³³ It involves a concealment of movements, a blurring of the relevant characteristics at the level of form, a suppression of the contrast between prey (or predator) and the environment, a tendency to diversification and dispersion within the field of power. In addition to a sudden silence and the stopping of all movement, this function of camouflage depends on the faculty of mimicry in animals, understood as the capacity to take on an appearance in conformity with the objects around them. Thus cicadas can mimic the colors of their host plant to avoid being spotted by a predator.

But more significantly, animals can truly mimic their own death and its outward manifestations: the rigidity of the corpse and the fixation of the gaze, which in biology is called the posture of “tonic immobility,” in the sense that immobility is maintained by effort (rather than through a relaxation of tone).³⁴ So some birds, like the kingfisher, in order to flee predators can strain their muscles to the point of spasm and thus pretend that they are long dead. Thanatosis refers to the use of ruses by animals, which supposes a certain technique, such as the restriction of breath or the relative petrification of the limbs, or even dropping to the ground: “A number of different physiological mechanisms can be involved in controlling Tonic Immobility. In vertebrates, reduced breathing rates, bradycardia, salivation, defecation and urination are common during Tonic Immobility.”³⁵ It can also consist, as in reptiles, of lying with the stomach facing upwards, the mouths open, and releasing a smelly liquid that simulates the smell of a corpse. The effectiveness of the protection in this case arises from the fact that the predator has an alimentary or reproductive relationship with the prey, and a dead animal is of no use to the prey because it is indigestible or unfit for reproduction.³⁶

The use in political philosophy of a biological concept like thanato-mimicry to describe strategies of resistance may seem strange. But mimicry as a primal activity of the organism has an aesthetic and political dimension, which takes the name of mimesis. Theodor Adorno considers this tendency toward mimesis and its ambiguous role in the organism’s adaptation to death.³⁷ He regards mimesis as what the processes of technological and civilizational rationalization seek to suppress. In fact, camouflage, the fact of being at one with nature or the environment, of taking on the appearance of the environment, is an archaic means of protecting the ego against the possibility of death, which should be replaced by rational praxis. But mimesis, from this perspective, is also associated with whole human groups like “Negroes” and “Jews,” according to Adorno, who notes that one racial trope consists in reducing them to the practices known as “antics.” By this account, they are imitators, concealers, and pretenders par excellence. Adorno does not so much treat mimesis as aroused by terror in biology; his emphasis is rather on the “mimesis of mimesis,” which is a force of civilizational terror (as in Hitler’s and Mussolini’s gesticulations and grimaces, or the drums at fascist ceremonies) and which becomes one of the aesthetic-political forms of anti-Semitism, such that racial aversion leads to phenomena of imitation among the trackers and controllers themselves.³⁸

In the context of migratory control today, it would seem that the “hunt” also relies on these archaic tracking functions, which are not so much repressed by the sophistication of biotechnologies as reactivated in another form. Thus, the use of sniffer dogs is aimed precisely at preventing migrants from camouflaging themselves and at discouraging their supposedly natural mechanisms of resistance. This use is inscribed in their genealogy, which goes back to the slave hunt.³⁹ In

this sense, one could say that the way in which migrants mimic the immobility of the objects that surround them and indeed their own death constitutes both the stylization of an archaic biological function and a civilizational regression that highlights the barbarity of said civilization, its wildness, when it seeks to technologically control living things for disciplinary or regulatory purposes. Finally, to trace thanato-mimetic forms of resistance to a primal biological reflex is not to biologize the political. This analytical gesture instead takes note of the effective biologization of border surveillance policies that are grafted onto life, its mobility, and its intrinsic dynamism for the purposes of population regulation. In this sense, resistance strategies that borrow from thanato-mimicry (such as the maximal retention of breath, but also the voluntary loss of the civil name) should be read according to the situation of encirclement in which the migrants find themselves, a situation resulting both from the dispersion of borders and their sophistication. These strategies, as we shall see, belong to the aestheticization of the self at that juncture where life joins art.

Practicing Autoimmunity: Against Yourself, for Yourself

Survival cannot involve the overreliance on all of the bodily functions that resist death (to paraphrase Xavier Bichat's formula⁴⁰) because defending one's life is not opposed to the suspension of that life, as paradoxical as that claim may appear. With the use of precise biometric sensors to detect vital presence and growth, the more vital reflexes (and therefore involuntary movements) linked to the tensions of hunting, fear, worry, and anxiety are expressed, the more the targeted migrants are detectable (because of increases in heart activity, lung ventilation, or body heat). How then to *play dead* to stay alive? How to reappropriate this reversal of life against itself operated by the biotechnologies of border surveillance?

This strategy, in which resistance and self-destruction become synonymous, should not, in my opinion, be confused with two other ways in which violence is revisited against oneself for political ends, whether in the case of the martyr as Achille Mbembe understands it in "Necropolitics," or the necro-resistances studied by Banu Bargu.⁴¹ Certainly, thanato-mimesis as a tactic of resistance really does involve making a mask of one's body. Mbembe uses this formula to speak of the "martyr," who uses life and its semblance (for instance, walking around casually) against other lives and thus produces death around him or herself, taking advantage of the reduction in vigilance that follows from the apparent banality of his or her appearance.⁴² But while "the body (of the martyr) is transformed into a weapon not in a metaphorical sense but in a proper ballistic sense," it seems to me that practices that include, for example, no longer eating, burning or cutting one's fingertips, self-mutilating, or sewing one's lips or eyelids shut relate more to what Bargu calls the "weaponization of life,"⁴³ in the sense that these acts correspond to no "theolo-

gized discourse of martyrdom” and no ideal of transcendent justice. Instead, these acts of resistance are sufficient in themselves to express their political nature. They are beyond the paradigm of instrumentality since they produce nothing other than survival and involve an understanding of how a life is worth living in a livable world and polis. But in the forms of resistance practiced by migrants at the border, can we speak of a “labor of dying,” as Bargu does in her discussion of the hunger strikes practiced by political prisoners in Turkey?

The “labor of dying” in the hunger strike, with its dietary metric of calories ingested each day and a controlled progression toward programmed death, refers, for Bargu, to a practice of resistance to prison conditions and to the imprisonment of political dissidents. It is therefore difficult to associate such a labor *prima facie* with the resistance of migrants. To be sure, this resistance also belongs to the repertoire of self-destruction, but it participates nonetheless in a struggle for life. Still, I think that it is possible to see in thanato-mimesis something like a labor of dying, even if this death is “fake.” The English expression “playing dead” is misleading, whereas in French *faire le mort* more accurately indicates this dimension of effort, stylization, and feigning. This is truly an apprenticeship, a process of learning how to play dead at the borders, as shown by ethnographic work documenting the circulation of knowledge about how to cross borders illegally, how to learn to burn one’s fingers properly, how to hold one’s breath as long as possible, and so forth.⁴⁴ What attests to this labor of dying as a forger’s work is precisely the pedagogies of faking death, or more generally the falsification of one’s bodily appearance (and not simply of one’s identity papers). In fact, these strategies can be relatively profitable, as evidenced by the fact that approximately 5 to 10 percent of all fingerprints are not identifiable due to scar marks left by knives and razors or fingertips burnt with heat, acid, and other skin-destroying products.⁴⁵

Therefore I do not understand thanato-mimetic acts as acts of necro-resistance, which in fact consist in using one’s own death to express oneself politically. In the case of suicides, self-immolation, and hunger strikes, the publicity is given to political commitments that in some way predate the resistance itself. In this sense, they are part of a recognizable political grammar, articulating clear demands understandable to everyone, supported by external groups that then supply meanings to political death. By contrast, I seek to identify the political meaning of the *simulations* of death and the simulations of anonymity and statelessness, which, in order to defeat necropolitics, imitate the effects of death rather than tragically realize them (as is the case in the above-mentioned examples). Thus, the fact of burning one’s fingers, cutting one’s skin or one’s tongue, and burning one’s identity papers and therefore passing as stateless are all strategies for bypassing identification and not forms of necro-resistance that organize the spectacle of death for the purposes of political mobilization, where the political “cause” survives the victim. Bargu thus

insists on the fact that the acts of self-destruction that she studies constitute “a commentary on the meaning of life by conveying the prioritization of the life of a political cause over the biological existence of its proponents.”⁴⁶ But it seems to me that, for example, when nine Iranian migrants in Calais had their mouths sewn shut in 2016 to protest against the announced dismantling of their camp, what stands out first and foremost is that the political cause is not detached from the migrants’ very desires for life and mobility. In fact, these forms of protest are foreign to the sacrificial logic that Bargu finds among people who go on hunger strike until death. In my opinion, these thanato-political struggles continue to belong to the affirmation of life rather than its methodical destruction for political reasons.

The point of vulnerability of—the *bug* within—high-tech surveillance devices is *radio silence*, which in military parlance means the interruption of all electromagnetic emissions of sound due to atmospheric or material disturbances or to a strategic effort to prevent the enemy from identifying one’s position. My point is that it is then possible to make use of one’s body, turning against it and against life, to silence the radios. This strategy arises all the more acutely for so-called “illegal” migrants: the fact is that they disobey, escape the government of their bodies and surveillance even though it is their life itself that is first “caught” by forms of digital X-ray of organic tissue, and then “captured.” We can think of the practices of self-mutilation, self-limitation and camouflage of the migrants targeted in these ways as forms of *life strike* or *self strike*. The latter concept refers to the process of disidentification initiated by the fact of burning one’s identity papers, and thus becoming anonymous and stateless for strategic purposes, to prevent deportation to one’s country of origin. The life strike refers to forms of falsifying or camouflaging identifying clues that are *embedded in the body*. Various researches in political sociology have studied the unprecedented repertoire of mobilization among migrants at border posts, but the thanato-political character of such resistances between life and death, such strategies of defense and self-preservation stemming from the *reappropriation of autoimmunity*, have not been highlighted in all its philosophical significance.

How to reappropriate and control what specifically escapes self-control? How do you stop your body heat or hold your breath without dying? It might seem impossible to hack the tracking machines when the apparatus of one’s body is not at their level of technological sophistication. But, paradoxically, the involuntary in us can become the object of a stylization—that is to say, of a tactic, if by “tactic” we mean a regulated use of an instrument adapted to its context of exercise and to its destination. But how to turn life against itself in this way? Doesn’t the triggering of an autoimmune reaction run the risk of cutting life short? Hunger strikes, the burning of fingertips, the sewing of eyelids and mouths, and the immolation of camps can be understood according to a logic of autoimmunity. This turning of life against

itself for the purposes of preservation is a way of turning the very logic of biotechnologies of surveillance against themselves, by suspending any signs of life likely to be tracked. Sewing your mouth shut, refusing to eat, burning your fingertips, holding your breath, covering yourself in thick clothes in summer: all are part of a political reappropriation of the aggression directed against oneself, a reappropriation conducive to *autoimmune subjectivation*. The morbidity of these mobilizations can be explained as a reaction to the organization of the police and judicial systems that want the bodies of migrants to speak out against themselves, to testify to their existence despite efforts to still its effects. It is to avoid this betrayal of the body by the body that some people go on hunger strikes, to erase the regular signs of life from the field of detection. For example, refusing to eat is understood as a concrete way in which migrant women can produce hormonal imbalances and amenorrhea (that is, the suspension of menstruation), whether to attest to their puberty in the context of minority tests in France, or to avoid being thrown from makeshift boats into the Mediterranean on the pretext that the period blood attracts sharks.⁴⁷ The very fact of monitoring one's caloric intake, of keeping it deficient in relation to daily activity, so that it has an impact on bone growth and on bone decalcification is certainly an art of not being governed.

According to Aristotle, in the process of nutrition, the natural heat of life is to food what the hand is at the helm in the direction of a ship. Nutrition, growth, and generation are for him the operations by means of which life acquires and preserves its *natural* existence,⁴⁸ the most obvious signs of life being sensation and locomotion. Nutrition, in fact, is a metabolic operation by which the living converts into its own substance what it feeds upon. Aristotle posits that in nature only the living is nourished, so that reciprocally we can recognize the living by its need to be nourished in order to conserve itself. It is therefore as animate that bodily being feeds itself. Is the refusal to eat, then, not precisely an operation of deanimation, a means of preventing the conservation of life by abstaining from food? In fact, only the animate being is capable of growth; to abstain from food is thus also to try to slow down growth.

Likewise, sewing one's mouth shut and cutting one's tongue is a way of refusing to be addressed by the police, the army, the judiciary, and forensic science. Burning one's fingertips is a tactic to prevent their comparison with the Eurodac fingerprint database, which comparison could lead to a migrant's deportation to the first country of entry into Europe, in accordance with the Dublin II Regulation. Holding one's breath allows one to bypass the CO₂ detectors during border crossings. Finally, covering oneself with several layers of clothing at the risk of suffocation in summer can deflect heartbeat detectors, even the most efficient ones such as those using laser doppler vibrometry covering two hundred meters (or the "Jetson" laser) developed by the Pentagon.⁴⁹ These are all characteristics of a thanato-politics that is based on the idea of playing dead, of suspending or camouflaging the involuntary functions of

life, over which one is not supposed to have control. It is therefore a matter of temporarily *dying alive*, that is, of surviving through death by turning life against itself. This turning of life and the body against the body is called autoimmunity.

Jacques Derrida affirms, in his seminar of January 22, 2003, that the wheel is the figure “of this menacing autoimmune condition called autoimmunity in general.”⁵⁰ It is based on a double movement: the circular movement around an axis (the axle), which symbolizes the relation to oneself in identity; the outward movement (spatial move) of the axle resulting from this internal rotation, and epitomizing the progression in life. The first defines the return to oneself, therefore the relation to oneself and autonomy (the wheels that turn on themselves); and the second operates an outward displacement, a translation in space that thus escapes stagnation and the end of life. For Derrida, the wheel corresponds to the metaphor (in Greek *metaphora*, or vehicle) of a logic of iterability (mixing repetition and difference), which is also the logic of autoimmunity. Selfhood (the fact of being for oneself), to strengthen itself, must therefore turn against itself and self-destruct within the limits of the conservation of life. Derrida posits that the living body “in order to protect itself and constitute itself as a single living self . . . must direct both for itself and against itself the immune defenses apparently intended for the non-self, for the enemy, the opposite, the adversary.”⁵¹

Autoimmunity is characterized by the fact that in order to protect itself, the body multiplies the defenses (framing, stops, conjurations, repressions) that, on the one hand, contribute to survival, but, on the other hand, can also worsen the disease or danger, or lead to death. Starting from the fact that biotechnologies, like parasites, feed on the lives of migrants onto which they are grafted, the migrants thus targeted stop feeding the machine and the wheel by abstaining from food. The immune reaction thus consists, for migrants, in welcoming the immune attack made by the enemy, redirecting it against oneself in order precisely to preserve life and be for oneself. Paradoxically, this death drive by which one keeps oneself alive and which therefore constitutes *immun* in Latin, that is to say, the exception to the law of the conservation of life, is what allows for dignity:

What are the mechanics of this double postulation (respect of life and sacrificiality)? I refer to it as mechanics because it reproduces, with the regularity of a technique, the instance of the non-living or, if you prefer, of the dead in the living. . . . This mechanical principle is apparently very simple: life has absolute value only if it is worth more than life. And hence only in so far as it mourns, becoming itself in the labour of infinite mourning, in the indemnification of a spectrality without limit.⁵²

In fact, the increasing number of suicides in migrant detention centers, the fatal hunger strikes, the ingestions of razor blades, nails, and washing powder: all par-

ticipate in this thanato-ethics, that is, in the effort to achieve dignity, to give value to an authentically lived life through death.

To what extent can the body be used as a weapon? And how is this a form of subjectivation? Should we break free from the notion of instrumental action? There are several points that seem to prevent us from discussing these processes of disidentification and self-destruction as forms of political subjectivation. All of these points are refutable, however. The first point refers to the association of the category of immunity with a paradigm of sovereignty, and the state, incompatible with the idea of political community understood in terms of the bonds of solidarity. Immunity in this sense refers to both exemptions, in the legal sense, and protections against foreign bodies, understood in the biological sense of the term. For Roberto Esposito, immunity characterizes precisely those policies *over* life (rather than policies *of* life) that aim to prioritize some lives, protecting them against others considered not really alive.⁵³ But this category of immunity, as Esposito understands it, leads to the negation of life and political subjectivation precisely to the extent that he situates it within the framework of a biologization of politics from the locus of sovereignty.

However, immunity practiced autonomously, as in the context of the politicization of autoimmunity by migrants themselves, does not come under a policy of subtraction as practiced by the authorities of national sovereignty. On the contrary, this politicization of autoimmunity is what allows lives held to be undesirable to remain in motion and thus to bear witness to a life that does not form part of a dispensable supplement, but a life that adds life to life, worlds to the world. If there is subjectivation and social movement in these forms of autoimmunity, it is also because they are persistent over time: it is, as Bargu reminds us, “the very synchronicity of these struggles and their wide ranging geographical distribution” that attests to their political character. “This intensification renders the weaponization of life an emergent repertoire rather than an isolated, random tactic, an individual act.”⁵⁴ But it is also the case that these tactics emerge from a borderline experience, at the edge of life, one that renews what is meant by politics and demonstrates the visceral attachment to being part of a livable world at all costs. In addition, these a priori morbid forms of resistance also constitute acts of “self-barbarization,” as James Scott says, in an analysis that shows how the supposed civility that belongs to the modern state is undermined at its borders by decivilising processes, on a quasi-industrial scale. As such, these thanato-mimetic, disidentifying forms of resistance also plead for forms of mobility that directly threaten the very essence of the nation-state.⁵⁵

The second point that might seem to indicate a form of desubjectivation rather than an alternative subjectivation is the apparent lack of visibility, publicity, demonstrations, and concerted action associated with these practices. Now, the presupposition of such an objection is that immunity, and even more so autoimmunity as a paradigm of biopolitical resistance, because it is based on what

of the body is undetachable (its expressive, phenotypic surface, its organic interiority), would necessarily remain invisible and would be inconsistent with the visibility of acts of citizenship. However, the practices of autoimmune subjectivation are not reducible to individual, scattered, silent, and imperceptible acts, practiced in the obscurity of consciousness, but are part of a common knowledge that circulates, is shared, and provides the basis of visible political mobilizations for a new conception of citizenship and political participation.⁵⁶ Consider those without fingerprints in Lampedusa, the “burners” of the Moria camp, the mouths sewn shut in Calais: all openly demonstrate the mutilation and destruction that they inflict on themselves in order to politicize the human condition so that the borders are exposed as unacceptable (whether to protest against attacks from the far right whose members burn down encampments, or against police harassment or institutionalized inhospitality).

Finally, the idea of a life *strike*, or of a self *strike*, is based on a metaphorical formulation of the strike: how indeed can the word that is supposed to designate a form of collective suspension of work in order to criticize the conditions in which the latter is exercised also come to designate forms of resistance to borders? Should we conclude that migration is a type of work since it necessitates some specific skills? In the field of migration studies, we have instead associated the strike with the mobilization of migrants who collectively disappeared for a day to show how the economy depends on their work, only to reappear massively in the public sphere this time (as in the “Day without Immigrants” in the United States and France).⁵⁷ However, it seems to me that the notion of strike in the cases I evoke also applies to the forms of muscular mobilizations that constitute a dimension of autonomy as Sandro Mezzadra defines it, insofar as it reminds us that life is a work of stylization, of the production of forms, that has material conditions of deployment. Suspending such an effort and learning to temporarily pretend to be dead or nameless, without a homeland, thus allows one to stay alive, to maintain the effort to continue one’s life, and to give it a form that is worth living.

Likewise, that actions should be designated as “strikes” even when they take place outside the context of formal employment is precisely what feminist theories have shown; for them, the strike refers to the sphere of work understood in the broad sense, productive and reproductive, so that any interruption of reproductive work, for example, can be understood as political resistance.⁵⁸ In fact, it would seem that the people who sew their mouths or their eyelids, or who carry out hunger strikes in detention centers or in camps near borders are men: admittedly the number of male migrants is greater in these places than women, but it appears that the gendered aspect of thanato-political resistance is already in play. Indeed, what do these hunger strikes and forms of self-abuse practiced by men tell us about the masculinity at stake at the border? There is something in the militarization of bor-

ders and their biotechnologization that disturbs the difference between the sexes based on racial presuppositions. Thus, we can hypothesize that these migrant men mimic their own lack of weapons, of hypersophisticated technological tools (including the biometric passports), of military masculinity, of virility understood as a matter of muscular, armed bodies in uniform, so that being unarmed is like being a woman. This feminization is characteristic of the strategies of military and police humiliation attached to the masculine virility of state power.

Paola Tabet shows how the difference between the sexes is underpinned by a construction of the gendered division of tools.⁵⁹ According to her, the control of tools by men leads to a structural technological underequipment of women, for whom only the body remains as a simple tool, usable in labor, reproduction, and sexual exploitation. Drawing on André Leroi-Gourhan, she shows how it is women who are thus prohibited or prevented from delegating the motor skills of their hands to a tool or an automatic machine. We could therefore think, following this line of analysis, that by exhibiting morbid features, migrant men are very far from bearing witness to that supposed culture of martyrdom specific to their society of origin or their religion. Their being deprived of tools is tantamount to their social death as men. But this interpretation seems to assume that the actions of these men necessarily reaffirm a patriarchal order in which their main demand would be their reinstatement as masculine, as heads of household, a demand that has the effect of depoliticizing and degrading their actions, which are, rather, more clearly acts of citizenship than they are acts of patriarchal masculinity. Such a line of analysis does not attend, then, to the fact that the established difference between the sexes and the control of tools by men overlaps with a racial difference, so that being deprived of tools, in this case “papers,” and being reduced to one’s body in crossing borders attest to methods for regulating populations, of targeting poor, non-European populations, whether of women or of men. However, it seems that migrant women’s resistance to borders does not take the form of the same thanato-mimetic practices that I have discussed, which does not mean that they are simply victims. On the contrary, it is notable that one of the ways these women resist borders and border violence is through the controlled use of their bodies, exercising what is considered a specific trait of their gender identity (their period and their ability to get pregnant and to give birth). Thus, at the risk of a severe hormonal imbalance, they can use contraceptive injections to avoid becoming pregnant during their exile, knowing that this contraceptive method is largely marginal in Europe following the controversies that emerged in the 1970s on taking Depo-Provera, to such an extent that the drug is now largely associated with newcomer migrant women. We have also seen that avoiding menstruation can be a way of establishing eligibility to board makeshift boats in the Mediterranean. Finally, a pregnancy, which may have been initially hidden in order to allow one to cross borders, can provide access to care and civil rights due to the state’s obligation

to offer obstetric protection.⁶⁰ What makes these different registers continuous with thanato-political forms of resistance is that they all point to an extreme, exhausting vigilance in migrant women in relation to the internal life of their bodies, since they develop an instrumental, almost military use of it, so that the injuries and constraints that are self-inflicted on their bodies attest to their ways of taking care of themselves.

To conclude, it seems that the axiom of the political phenomenology according to which (in Hannah Arendt's formulation) everything that has an eye has an urge to be seen should be relativized,⁶¹ since the visible and the invisible are not polar opposites when it comes to political subjectivation. Their difference should not be taken for granted or conceived in terms of a rigid barrier, for such a barrier prevents us from understanding the continuity of subaltern modes of resistance and the public mobilizations of recent migrants. Finally, practices of thanato-mimetic resistance and muscular mobilization that seek to thwart visual capture by biotechnological means also constitute a critique of the simulacra produced by artificial intelligence. These technologies are based on a conception of life so impoverished that it forgets that the living are capable of cunning, capable, in other words, of producing their own simulacra in an effort to clear paths for new forms of life, even by simulating their own deaths to evade detection.

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Notes

1. Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience," 194.
2. Broeders and Engbersen, "Fight against Illegal Migration"; Broeders, "New Digital Borders of Europe."
3. Esposito, *Communauté, immunité, biopolitique*, 131–33.
4. Mbembe, "Necropolitics."

5. See Dorlin, *Se défendre*.
6. In this article, this formula refers to a mutation in the biologization of race; it designates the way in which race is the result of a military, medical, and forensic overinvestment in the body and in foreigners' lives in their involuntary internal dimensions, so that people find themselves defenseless because they are betrayed by the essential vitality of their bodies. I thus define racial biologization as a political concept with which to understand the functioning of migration regulation policies in the era of surveillance biotechnologies and not the functioning of health policies. Although the two processes are related, this concept does not refer to the biologization of race defined as the process by which the differential treatment of foreign or nonwhite persons *metabolizes race* by developing biological diseases or abnormalities at rates disproportionate compared to the rest of the population (where such diseases and abnormalities include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, certain cancers, low birth weight, preterm delivery, and COVID-19 mortality). On this last subject, see Gravelee, "How Race Becomes Biology."
7. See Tyszler, "From Controlling Mobilities": "There are entry routes used by Sub-Saharanans: jumping the barrier, boats at sea, hiding in vehicles. Unlike Syrians who pass through the border control post, usually with falsified or stolen passports. Here, yes, there are Whites and Blacks, Sub-Saharanans cannot come walking."
8. Chamayou, *Manhunts*.
9. We can think of the first heavier-than-air flying machine designed by the Wright brothers in 1903, which was inspired by the flight of the pigeon; or the Velcro inspired by the spikes on certain plants for the propagation of their seeds via the coats of animals. Architects are able to draw inspiration from termite mounds to design building structures with passive air-conditioning. Likewise, the study of shark skin has given rise to efficient swimming suits, as well as the production of a varnish for the fuselage of aircraft. For an example of biomimicry in design, see El Zeini, "Biomimicry as a Problem Solving Methodology in Interior Architecture."
10. Frontex, the European border and coast guard agency, which applies military technology to European border control, has 21 planes, 27 helicopters, 116 ships, mobile radar units, mobile night vision detectors, aerial tools, patrol cars, and heartbeat detectors. The producer FLIR, which presents itself as the world leader in thermal imaging, boasts on its website about its geolocation capabilities and technology for the tracking of targets, especially small boats. It presents its tools as enhancers of our visual abilities:

Border security and surveillance is a 24/7 operation that can't afford downtime or periods of reduced readiness. Guarding against illegal immigration, smuggling, and terrorism demands reliable long-range threat detection and positive identification of potential threats all day, all night, and in all conditions. Whether your primary targets are small boats on the water, or people crossing borders on foot, FLIR's high performance cameras and radars can give you the early warning and threat assessment you need to respond efficiently and effectively. With industry standard interfaces, FLIR components are easy to integrate with the command and control solution you desire to create the rapid deployment solution you need. (FLIR Systems, "Border Surveillance")
11. Hedwig Wagner, "Les frontières extérieures," 135; translation mine.
12. *La voix du nord*, "Au port de Calais"; translation mine.
13. *Brussels Times*, "Thermal Cameras."
14. See Didi-Huberman, "L'image scientifique et pseudo-scientifique."

15. Foucault, *Mal faire, dire vrai*.
16. In *The Time-Image*, Gilles Deleuze insists on the power of the false and the art of being a forger as real powers of life: “Only the creative artist takes the power of the false to a degree which is realized, not in form, but in transformation. There is no longer truth or appearance” (146).
17. This article stipulates that “Radiological bone examinations for the purpose of determining age, in the absence of valid identity documents and when the alleged age is not probable, can only be carried out by order of the judicial authority and after obtaining the consent of the person concerned” (law number 2026-297, March 14, 2016, art. 43, www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000032207650/).
18. Lendaro, “Minor to the Bone?,” 378.
19. “Whether we like it or not, the young people all have a somewhat similar name. . . . We sometimes find that they have the same head. . . . We have a lot of trouble compared to other audiences (non-foreign minors) where we are very involved in cases to be individualized,” says a judge for children, in comments reported in Lendaro, “Minors to the Bone?,” 378.
20. Simonite, “The Best Algorithms Struggle.”
21. “The last one we see . . . I think he’s a lot more than sixteen years old, I mean physically. . . . I don’t know what you think, but . . . there he seems to be more than sixteen years old. Finally, there it is. And in this case, the clavicle test is interesting for him. Because, in my opinion, he’s closer to twenty than to sixteen.” These are the words of a juvenile judge after a hearing, as reported by Lendaro, “Minor to the Bone?,” 384 (translation modified).
22. The South African athlete Caster Semenya had to pass femininity tests (relying on blood samples, genital examinations, and chromosomal analysis) to certify her femininity to international sports authorities. For further analysis, see Pastor, “Unwarranted and Invasive Scrutiny.”
23. Greulich and Pyle, *Radiographic Atlas of Skeletal Development of the Hand and Wrist*.
24. Tanner and Whitehouse, *A New System for Estimating the Maturity of the Hand and Wrist*.
25. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 7–8.
26. In December 2017, the Naomi Musenga case hit the headlines in France: when Musenga called for help, in agonizing pain, the operators of the emergency medical services laughed at her, at her accent, and claimed that she was exaggerating her pain (BBC, “Naomi Nusenga Death”). The young Black woman died a few hours after this call. She was victim of the stereotype that continues to be reproduced in the training of care professions: the “Mediterranean syndrome,” which Frantz Fanon called “North African Syndrome” (in *Toward the African Revolution*), refers to a category within ethno-psychiatric and colonial medicine, according to which people of African origin exaggerate their feelings of pain.
27. For an example of vigilante citizens hunting migrants, see Brunwasser, “Bulgaria’s Vigilante Migrant ‘Hunter.’”
28. See Chamayou, *Drone Theory*.
29. However, the distancing does not completely elude the carnal hold, and the enjoyment of the caught flesh. It is simply the prerequisite or the counterpart of a direct, brutal violence, as Jacques Derrida says:

Violence has two ages. The one . . . appears “contemporary,” in sync or in step with the hypersophistication of military tele-technology—of “digital” and cyberspaced culture. The other is a “new archaic violence”; if one can put it that way. It counters the first and everything it represents. Revenge. Resorting, in fact, to the same resources of mediatic

power, it reverts (according to the return, the resource, the reprimation and the law of internal and autoimmune reactivity we are trying to formalize here) as closely as possible to the body proper and to the premachinal living being. In any case, to its desire and to its phantasm. Revenge is taken against the decorporalizing and expropriating machine by resorting—reverting—to bare hands, to the sexual organs or to primitive tools, often to weapons other than firearms [l'arme blanche]. What is referred to as “killings” and “atrocities”—words never used in “clean” or “proper” wars, where, precisely, the dead are no longer counted (guided or “intelligent” missiles directed at entire cities, for instance)—is here supplanted by tortures, beheadings and mutilations of all sorts. (“Faith and Knowledge,” 88)

30. Quoted in Canguilhem, *Le normal et le pathologique*, 180.
31. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.
32. For an account of the autonomy of migration, see Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method and the Multiplication of Labor*.
33. See Boulard, *Mimétisme*.
34. So it is with cicadas:
 Simulation of death, a classic defense in other groups of insects, notably Coleoptera, . . . reflex immobilization simulating death is practiced as needed by *Spoerryana llewelyni* Boul. and by the *Paectira* of East Africa, small cespiticolous species in which thanatosis was first observed: worried by a pressing danger, these little Cicadas, flying badly or not at all, unravel their stems, fold up wings and legs against the body and drop to the ground, where they disappear between the thick feet of grasses. There, they remain as they have fallen, without making any more movements during the more or less variable time that will be necessary to remove the danger. If you haven't seen them fall, it's almost impossible to find them. This behavior, automimesian in a way since the insect mimics its own corpse, seems to me to be the rule today among the little Cicadas living in areas with a strong predominance of grass. But it is also observed in other species: *Tettigetta pygmaea* (Olivier) and *Cicadatra atra* (Olivier) for example simulate death in our hands or if we let them fall to the ground. (Boulard, “Apparence et mimétisme chez les cigales,” 1033; translation mine)
35. Humphreys and Ruxton, “A Review of Thanatosis,” 22.
36. “One obvious potential mechanism [by which Tonic Immobility might confer protection from predators] is that the immobile state might actually be death feigning, where the predator has an aversion to long-dead prey (which might be adaptive because of risk from toxins produced by microbial spoilage). In this case, Tonic Immobility causes the predator to mistakenly reject a live individual because it is misidentified as a long-dead individual. An implication of this is that the predator must have very simple cognitive functioning in this regard, since the individual that now appears dead was obviously very much alive moments earlier” (Humphreys and Ruxton, “A Review of Thanatosis,” 22).
37. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 149–50.
38. “They detest the Jews and imitate them constantly. There is no anti-Semite who does not feel an instinctive urge to ape what he takes to be Jewishness” (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 151). But since this Jewishness is already a caricature, they mimic a fiction.
39. For a sensitive description of what it means to be chased by dogs as a runaway slave, see the poignant novel by Patrick Chamoiseau, *Slave Old Man*.

40. Bichat, *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort*, 1.
41. Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*.
42. “The candidate for martyrdom transforms his or her body into a mask that hides the soon-to-be-detonated weapon. Unlike the tank or the missile that is clearly visible, the weapon carried in the shape of the body is invisible. Thus concealed, it forms part of the body. It is so intimately part of the body that at the time of detonation it annihilates the body of its bearer, who carries with it the bodies of others when it does not reduce them to pieces. The body does not simply conceal a weapon. The body is transformed into a weapon, not in a metaphorical sense but in the truly ballistic sense” (Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 36).
43. Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*, 34.
44. Séhili and Züniga, “Une lecture des migrations.”
45. BBC, “Sweden Refugees Mutilate Fingers.”
46. Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*, 35.
47. “The day of possible crossing, female menstruation is forbidden: ‘That’s catastrophic, that’s why if you’re on your period no one must know. They say that when a girl is on her period she can’t go out on the sea otherwise the sharks will come,’ ‘If the chairman finds out he won’t put you in the convoy’ explained multiple women I met at the border. This prohibition forces them to adopt strategies to avoid menstruation: ‘We swallowed a whole bunch of stuff over there! All the girls did really. We used to take two, four [contraceptive] tablets a day. Some girls even swallowed whole packets, it’s dangerous! But it’s to travel! To travel people are capable of anything!’” (Tyszler, “From Controlling Mobilities”).
48. Aristotle, *De Anima*, bk. 1, pt. 2.
49. In 2019, the US military developed a laser vibrometry detector dubbed “Jetson.” This is an identification system that is much more reliable than facial recognition, because like the shape of the iris or fingerprints, the heart rate is unique to each person: it depends on the shape and size of the heart but also the orientation of the valves. Unlike in facial recognition, there is no need to clearly see a face to recognize a “suspect.” The prototype developed by the Pentagon works using laser Doppler vibrometry: a laser measures the Doppler effect of the vibration between the transmitted signal and the reflected signal to deduce the frequency and phase of the heartbeat. This monitoring technology was designed on the basis of the observation of a device normally used to detect vibrations from a distance in structures such as wind turbine blades (Hambling, “The Pentagon Has a Laser”).
50. Derrida, *La bête et le souverain*, 120; translation mine.
51. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 224; translation mine.
52. Derrida, *Faith and Knowledge*, 86–87.
53. Esposito, *Communauté, immunité, biopolitique*, 131–33.
54. Bargu, *Starve and Immolate*, 34.
55. For a case study in anthropology of resistance led by nomadic peoples against the establishment of a central State, see Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*.
56. For an in-depth study on the redistribution of political boundaries through mobilizations around contemporary migrations, see McNevin, *Contesting Citizenship*.
57. On this economy of visibility of migrants’ mobilizations, see Amaya-Castro, “‘We Are Here!’”
58. For a renewed conception of the feminist strike at the border, see Gago, “#We Strike.”
59. Tabet, “Hands, Tools, Weapons.”

60. For a case study on the relationship between pregnancy status and access to health insurance for migrant women, see Virole-Zodje, “‘Becoming Mother,’ ‘Becoming Subject?’”
61. “*Whatever can see wants to be seen, whatever can hear calls out to be heard, whatever can touch presents itself to be touched.* It is indeed as though everything that is alive—in addition to the fact that its surface is made for appearance, fit to be seen and meant to appear to others—has an urge to *appear*, to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its ‘inner self’ but itself as an individual” (Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 29).

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