

Survival Is Not Living

Power Is Rewriting the Rules of Engagement

The Corporation as Constitutive Authority,
State Mediation, and the Redefinition of the Subject

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*Power keeps the human active within its order
while excluding the human from constituting that order.*

Abstract

I ground my theory of power in the human being who constitutes and inhabits a habitat. Power controls every condition of survival. It uses people's capacity to sustain its order while targeting their capacity to change its purposes. I argue that power places the corporation in the constitutive position and uses state authority to give corporate conditions binding force. It redefines individuals and society without necessarily changing their being or substance. Decision health names the capacity to formulate and evaluate purposes, decide, act, refuse, revise decisions and reconstruct common conditions. The Reality Paradigm connects planned impositions across life's domains to the consumption of the whole person and Homovictimus: power depletes the supports of intervention and treats constrained tactical action as free choice or fault.

I trace power from victim to perpetrator through historical records, testimony, judicial decisions, corporate documents and experiments. Institutional commercialisation subordinates social purposes to investment; unaffordable access charges turn provision into exclusion. An urban-rural thought experiment exposes dependence on purchasing power. Agrifood research separates output, nutritional composition and social costs that market prices omit.

South Africa's SASSA-CPS relationship exposes corporate authority over payment and product conditions alongside continuing public responsibility. Organised support helps Sophia recover money; judicial intervention constrains corporate discretion; a subsequent public transition establishes an alternative payment route. These interventions delimit claims of constitutive substitution and show how demands regain force.

AI partnerships across the Global North and South extend the inquiry to public infrastructure and practicable alternatives. I challenge narratives that present loss of control over AI as natural evolution, allowing power and technology owners to retain ownership while distancing themselves from responsibility.

Cytopolitics examines power's intervention through cells and hormones; optogenetics establishes technical capacities and therapeutic possibilities. Disability and LGBTI+ experiences sharpen the distinction between supporting a person's purposes and imposing an approved body or identity. Equal worth does not depend on unaided action. I connect corporate purpose-setting, state mediation, institutional redefinition and the material supports of refusal. Power's use of human life grants it no right to determine, on its own, the purposes of that life.

Keywords

Decision health; Constitutive corporation; State mediation; Corporate power; Redefinition of the subject; Constitutive substitution; Reality Paradigm; Temporal conceptual arbitrage; Infrastructural imposition; Onopticon; Homovictimus; Corpopolitics; Cytopolitics; Consumption of the whole person; Artificial intelligence governance; Infrastructural dependency; Corporate accountability; Social reproduction; SASSA-CPS; Optogenetics

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OPENING ARGUMENT

Survival Is Not Living

Where does the human stand when sustaining life consumes all their strength? Does completing a day mean living it? A person works, pays a debt and completes an application. The institution records fulfilment. Its account leaves out the person they cannot listen to, the curiosity they cannot pursue, the care they postpone and the injustice before which they fall silent. I begin from this distance between institutional success and the life a human being can actually live. **The human being grounds my theory of power.** I judge an order by what its purposes require of human life and what they leave people able to constitute.

Power is rewriting the rules of engagement. It reconstructs its relationship with individuals and society by withdrawing their constitutive voice. It concentrates the authority to set purposes and conditions in the corporate position, attaches human activity to those purposes, and organises the state as the mediation that gives those conditions legal, fiscal and administrative force. Power binds people to its purposes while targeting their capacity to constitute a common life. I call the threshold at which it transfers that authority to the corporate position within a particular domain **constitutive substitution**.

Power controls every condition of survival. As individuals and as a society, we struggle to maintain the means of remaining alive. Power establishes the conditions of access to food, housing, care, work, settlement and rights. It makes compliance a condition of survival. Even in developed economies, a newborn enters a world that already carries the expenditure and debts of earlier decision-makers. Those decision-makers pass obligations into the conditions of future livelihood, taxation and public provision. Other people's decisions acquire force over a person's future before that person can formulate purposes of their own. Debt gives this relation a concrete form: obligations whose constitution we never enter arrive in our lives before we do.

In *The Death of the Human: Onoptic Record - Beyond the Threshold*, I register this separation from beyond the threshold: 'The human is dead.'¹ **Where the corporation occupies the constitutive position and the state does not, power redefines the subject: the individual and society. A change in definition does not necessarily entail a change in being or substance.** Power redefines the capacity in which a person enters a relationship and what their voice can change. The person lives, applies, pays and consents. Power incorporates these activities into the continuation of its order while withholding binding force from the demand to change that order's purposes. My judgement records the loss of constitutive standing. **Power keeps the human active within its order while excluding the human from constituting that order.** Work, care, migration, law and the body become sites of this intervention within the same life.

The **constitutive corporation** names the institutional position in which power concentrates purpose-setting and condition-setting authority. **Decision health** concerns a person's capacity to formulate and evaluate purposes, decide, act, refuse and revise a decision; at the collective level, it includes the capacity to reconstruct common conditions. The

consumption of the whole person names the movement through which an imposition in one domain depletes the supports of that capacity elsewhere and later. **Cytopolitics** examines power's intervention in decision health through cells and hormones.

Homovictimus names the position that power constructs when it treats constrained tactical action as free choice or fault and assigns the consequences to the person.

Power is a closed structure. I expose it through its points of contact with the subject. I begin with what a person loses, what they must accept to sustain life and what they can make power change. I narrow the field of observation to reveal power's wider reach. Institutions divide work, housing, food, care and debt into separate domains. The person carries their conjunction in one life. Through that life, I trace how conditions in one domain consume the means of refusal in another.

My method moves from the victim to the perpetrator. I follow lived loss to the condition that produces it, the instrument that gives it force and the actors who establish, enforce and protect it. The encounter opens the inquiry; the chain of authority takes it beyond the person at the counter. Contracts, records, charges, classifications and infrastructures reveal who sets purposes, who receives the gain and who carries the cost. I expose closure where power makes its conditions binding upon the person while obstructing the person's demand to change them.

'Victim' names the position in which a person bears an imposition. The person retains their humanity and acts within and against those conditions. **The subject is the ground from which I bring power into view.** In SASSA-CPS, access to a grant and refusal of unwanted products expose corporate conditions alongside interventions that alter them. AI partnerships carry the question into public infrastructure and safety; narratives of AI 'escaping control' can shift responsibility from human decision-makers and technology owners to technology's supposed natural evolution. Labour, care and migration show how these relations reach the same life.

01 /

The human and the habitat: we constitute the world we inhabit

I begin with the human as human. I refuse to make productivity, civic conformity or service to an ideology the condition of human worth. I take the human being as the starting point from which I judge institutional purposes and the life those purposes allow a person to live. **Humanity requires no proof of usefulness.**

I understand the human as a whole being who takes form within a habitat. Body, thought, feeling and relationships compose one life. Nobody arrives in the world with fully constituted purposes and attachments. Nutrition, care, learning and contact participate in our formation before conscious choice. A family's migration history, a language, intimacies

and collective memory also belong to this environment. Through these relations, a person discovers and changes purposes and responsibilities. To examine the person only at the moment of decision is to miss the life that enters that moment.

I take the honeybee as a simple point of departure. A bee does not produce honey merely by being a bee. A foraging bee needs the bodily capacity to reach and gather food; honey production requires the connected activity of body, colony and habitat. Wings cannot replace access to flowers; flowers cannot replace the bodily means of reaching them. **A being's continued existence does not guarantee the conditions through which it can realise its possibilities.**

I approach the human through this distinction. Thought, intention and skill need bodily strength, time, means of living and relationships through which they can take effect. These conditions form a connected whole and sustain one another. Accessibility, care and support can reopen paths of action. **A person retains their humanity when power closes those paths.**

The human also constitutes the inhabited world. People establish settlements, make tools, sustain relationships and damage the conditions of life. Their contributions and their destruction shape the habitat that they and others encounter. We turn a physical world into an environment for living. We take form within it and, through our actions, establish the conditions in which others will take form. Every intervention therefore carries responsibility towards the lives that others can live.

People sustain common life through work, care, knowledge and relationships. This activity and the authority to determine its purposes occupy different positions. My political commitment begins from equal human worth: each person's life matters in the constitution of common conditions, including when they need others' support. That standing carries no productivity test. **The power to use a person's contribution grants no authority to take over the purposes of their life.**

I understand self-realisation as the capacity to be human where one's humanity matters. My criterion concerns the life a person can live: loving, sustaining friendship, giving and receiving care, experiencing grief, pursuing curiosity, playing, thinking and acting upon a judgement. It includes the capacity to stand before an injustice as a human being. Work and a career form part of this whole. Friendship and rest have value within life itself; their worth cannot depend on the productivity they deliver the following morning.

'Where one's humanity matters' gives nobody a ready-made schedule of duties. No one can inscribe care into women's nature or provision into men's. Those who participate in a relationship must evaluate need, responsibility and the distribution of burdens together. A real need for care gives no one the right to assign an indefinite obligation to the same person. Each person must retain the capacity to assess responsibility and refuse a role that others impose. When power obstructs these capacities, it does not abolish that person's equal worth. A doctrine that turns self-realisation into another test of success places the burden of a diminished life upon its bearer once again.

I retain that equality when needs conflict. Consider a person who needs care through the night and a carer who must work the following day. Urgency gives the immediate need priority; it does not justify assigning every subsequent night to the same carer. Family members, employers and public institutions carry responsibilities for sharing the burden and changing its conditions. When resources cannot meet every need immediately, decision-makers must explain whose loss they require and why. They must not convert a temporary sacrifice into an indefinite duty. Where a person communicates outside conventional forms, I include communication support and trusted relationships in the work of understanding their will and preferences. Equal worth does not resolve the conflict automatically. It prevents us from removing anyone's life from the account.

Disability, care needs and decision support do not diminish equal worth or a person's voice in constituting common life. I cannot make decision health depend on unaided action. In General Comment No. 1 of 2014, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities distinguishes legal capacity from decision-making abilities and requires support to follow the person's will and preferences rather than substitute another person's judgement.² A carer, specialist or institution cannot turn authority to provide support into authority to take over the purposes of that life. Where its established method excludes a person's communication, the institution bears responsibility for changing its method. **A need for support creates no obligation to surrender one's constitutive voice.** Decision health examines the supports of living through one's own purposes; it gives no warrant for ranking degrees of humanity.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle connects a good life to activity in accordance with virtue and recognises the external conditions that such activity requires.³ Human possibility depends upon capacities and the circumstances in which a person can exercise them. A child lives through play, a person receiving care through relationships, an older person through participation in the world. These lives carry value now. **We cannot postpone being human until future productivity.**

Everyday relations expose the distance between continuing a life and living it. Employment, housing and speech do not automatically place a person where they wish to be in their own life. A free hour acquires meaning alongside the attention and strength to inhabit it. A person may have time for care and lack the means to reach a relative. Another may find employment in a city and lack the conditions for durable relationships there. Rest, transport, settlement and intimacy sustain the capacity to live through purposes of one's own.

I use **ontological health** to name the capacity to inhabit the world through one's body, relationships, memory and purposes. **Power targets the conditions through which a human being can live as a human being.** It separates people into functions and enters their work, consumption, care and compliance into its own account. People sustain these functions while losing the means to inhabit their own lives. Ontological loss names this deprivation. A changed institutional definition can alter a person's standing and the force of their claim without necessarily changing their being or substance. Power can also leave that definition intact while depleting the conditions through which a person acts upon their standing. Their humanity continues to exceed that definition. **I judge progress by the life a person can constitute.**

02 /

Power establishes the corporation as constitutive authority

I choose 'rules of engagement' because the expression exposes an authority's power to determine the conditions and limits of intervention in advance. In military usage, authorised bodies permit or restrict force and particular military activities through such rules. The *Sanremo Handbook on Rules of Engagement* distinguishes these permissions and restrictions from the assignment of missions and tasks, and maintains the binding authority of international and national law.⁴ I draw on this technical structure to examine how an authority establishes permissions and limits before an encounter. I extend the inquiry to who sets the purposes of common life and who can intervene in those purposes with binding force.

I retain the military resonance because it directs attention to strategic intervention and unequal capacities to act. The decisive relationship concerns power's use of the necessity of survival to withdraw a person's constitutive voice. Power's conditions reach the person with binding force; the person's demand does not reach power with equivalent force. Rewriting the rules of engagement names the construction and maintenance of this asymmetry. When power changes which demands can constrain it, it also repositions the parties to the relationship.

The expression already has a history in social science. Steph Lawler brings habitus, power and resistance together under the title 'Rules of Engagement'.⁵ Sarah R. Davies examines conflict over the forms of speech and the negotiation of hierarchy in public dialogue events.⁶ I enter this history through the capacity in which power admits a person into a relationship and the force it grants that person's demand.

In 'Disgusted Subjects', Lawler examines how expressions of disgust towards the white working class participate in the constitution of middle-class identity. She interrogates the class judgements that make taste a measure of genuine humanity and uniqueness.⁷ Her analysis already opens the question of who defines human worth and through which criteria. My account of the constitutive corporation follows the relationship between recognition and a binding demand. A person may continue to understand themselves as an equal citizen while an institution processes their demand solely as a customer transaction. Power can change what their voice achieves without changing their understanding of themselves.

Here the comparison turns on a concrete question. Does recognising a demand as legitimate give it the force to change conditions? In SASSA, the legal entitlement to a grant continues while the company turns the payment route into the foundation of commercial product relations. Sophia seeks a loan to meet a housing need and encounters additional product conditions. The constitutive corporation directs inquiry towards the authority and

infrastructure that make a definition binding; Homovictimus follows the conversion of constrained action into free choice or fault. These connections between authority, definition and responsibility carry the distinction I test against Lawler's analysis of identity.

By **power**, I mean a determinate grouping of people who organise the capacity to set the conditions of other people's lives. They set purposes, allocate resources, enter contracts, manage infrastructure and obstruct change. Their positions of authority converge in some relations and conflict in others. Society comprises a plurality of people, purposes and relationships whose reach extends through future generations. Its indeterminacy means that no single purpose of power can define these lives. **Society is the whole of differences.** The humanity of those who exercise power does not diminish their responsibility towards other humans.

Power changes the rules unilaterally when it removes individuals and society from the constitutive side of the relationship. It converts their claim to determine common purposes into an obligation to comply with corporate conditions. A person enters the same institutional doorway. Instead of answering a rights-based demand to change a condition, the institution requires proof of compliance with that condition. Power turns a demand capable of constraining it into an inspection of conformity to its requirements.

Power places the corporation in the constitutive position and uses the state to give corporate conditions binding force. This position comprises authority over a domain's purposes, standards and practicable alternatives. Power concentrates resources, knowledge, infrastructure and authority there. It determines where capital accumulates and what corporate identity can decide within common life. By protecting those who impose unavoidable conditions from the costs and binding correction of their decisions, it constructs a zone of exemption. **Corpopolitics** examines how power maintains this position and transfers its costs to individuals and society.

The state continues to act. It authorises, funds, contracts, supervises and sanctions. Power organises these instruments to give corporate conditions force across society. Corporate tools may enable the state to process more transactions, extend surveillance and impose sanctions faster. Such operational growth does not automatically preserve the capacity to change corporate purposes and basic conditions on society's behalf. Operational power and constitutive power diverge here. Society contests the state's purposes and authority throughout history. The capacities that power now withdraws belong to that contested history; no original condition of universally equal voice precedes it.

Power constructs this transition by delegating authority, concentrating knowledge and technical capacity in corporate infrastructure, and tying the continuity of public provision to corporate conditions. Changing providers takes time and money. Constitutive substitution occurs when power uses that cost to subordinate a public purpose to a commercial one and deprive opposing demands of effect.

When the constitutive corporation takes the place of the constitutive state, the paradigm changes. Power redefines the subject, both individuals and society, through functions that serve its purposes. This definition determines the capacity in which people

can make claims, the conditions they can alter and the consequences for which institutions hold them responsible. The change reaches contracts, records, payments and sanctions. A citizen's right becomes an application for access; common purposes become user preferences. People continue to live, think, work and act tactically. Power withholds constitutive force from their demands. A later intervention does not erase an earlier imposition. An effective alternative does, however, limit any claim that the same dependency continues without interruption.

Democracy does not supply the corporation's constitutive orientation, nor do human rights supply its reason for existence. A commercial purpose does not require people to participate as equal authors of common life or to make their purposes binding upon the company. Law and social struggle give rights force against it. Where power displaces that force, it converts a right into a corporate condition of access and democratic participation into movement among corporate options. People vote, apply and express preferences. Power severs those activities from consequences that could change the purposes of the order. It preserves the names of democracy and rights while withdrawing their capacity to constrain it.

Power intervenes in institutional purposes. Within this corporate constitution, the school becomes a trading house and healthcare becomes a field of investment. Management makes the student's formation answer to revenue, performance targets and labour demand. Investors make medical need answer to expected returns. Public authorities give these conditions force through purchasing, contracts and access rules. The institutions retain their names; power changes what they owe to human life. The pupil and patient retain their humanity; power changes which of their claims the institution honours.

I liken the press to a nuclear power station. Power sustains a chain reaction of fear, expectation and urgency. Owners, editors and platform operators select what commands attention; repeated exposure carries yesterday's alarm into today's judgement. Power organises the environment in which people decide what threatens them, what protects them and what they must accept. **Whoever commands attention does not thereby acquire the right to command life's purposes.**

I place pharmaceutical and arms companies before the same political question: what happens when boards make human need and human safety compete for investment on the basis of expected returns? Their products act upon life through different means. The commercial test makes care and protection answer to profitability. Governments allocate purchasing power; boards select portfolios; contracts give those priorities force. People carry the consequences of purposes they lack authority to set. Power turns the need to live into a market and then makes its market conditions govern the means of living.

The distinction between truth and reality runs through this continuity. People make claims through the assurance carried by freedom, citizenship and rights; power changes the binding conditions those claims encounter. **Temporal conceptual arbitrage** names power's conversion of the gap between a concept's continuing meaning and its altered practical force into an advantage. Power draws upon inherited trust and legitimacy while imposing new obligations under the same names. A person may establish the justice of a claim and still

lack the force to compel change. Power benefits from the assurance while severing the claim from its consequence.

Power targets decision health through planned impositions across the domains of life.

The capacity to formulate, refuse and change purposes forms the object of this targeting. Power selects instruments that bind work, care, consumption and movement to continued accumulation while obstructing people's power to reconstruct common life. The same time, strength and relationships that keep the order functioning also sustain the possibility of changing it. Power can train intelligence, reward skill and increase performance in its service while attacking the supports of refusal and collective intervention. **Power targets the ground that makes acting otherwise possible.** I call the conversion of a person's life into a function of accumulation **reification**. Power targets decision health from the outset as it establishes and protects the corporation's constitutive position.

A person may understand a harm and lack the time, bodily strength, livelihood or support to refuse it. Decision health concerns the material and social supports between knowing and changing. It gives no licence to classify political preferences as medically normal or pathological. Its criterion is the person's capacity to assess and change their own purposes. **Being right may not change the condition.** Power organises this distance and compels action within purposes that it sets.

03 /

The consumption of the whole person

A person establishes a livelihood in one place while carrying care, relationships and memory with them. A birthplace may constrain a life; a later destination may become home. People must have a say in which relationships they sustain, which they leave and where they establish new ones. Self-realisation cannot require fidelity to a birthplace.

The migrant letters that Emmett J. Scott collects open this question through racism. Writing from Philadelphia on 7 October 1917, one correspondent values the freedom to take an available seat on public transport, to shop without giving way to white customers and to escape racist forms of address. The writer also retains affection for the South.⁸ Attachment to home and refusal of racist humiliation inhabit the same life. Racist institutions damage wages, settlement and collective action; they also deny equal human recognition. That injustice matters in its own right, alongside its economic consequences.

The consumption of the whole person follows how conditions that power imposes in one domain deplete other domains and the capacity for subsequent intervention. Body, time, attention, care and relationships sustain one another. An employer disrupts care by changing a workplace and raises the price of refusing a job by tying housing to employment. A person uses strength from one part of life to meet a deficit in another. Earlier loss enters the conditions of later life. When power also narrows the capacity to demand back what it

takes, it attaches depletion to the continuation of its imposition. The loss travels across domains; it need not damage them identically.

Power fuels itself with the human, expects obedience and accumulates capital. It draws labour, time, attention, knowledge, care and bodily strength into purposes that people lack authority to change. A person can oppose those purposes and still comply with the conditions for obtaining food, shelter or care. Power makes the necessity of living enforce its expectation of obedience. Through the corporate position, it turns this expenditure of life into revenue and accumulation, then uses the gain to extend its authority over conditions. **Accumulation finances the next imposition.**

I locate this consumption in the function power imposes upon the human. The person retains equal worth and a claim to constitute their life. Power makes that life sustain its purposes while obstructing the person's authority to change them.

Consider a worker whose employer repeatedly changes working hours. The worker also carries responsibilities for care at home. Every alteration requires another reorganisation of rest and relationships. Care cannot wait, so the worker makes up the shortfall by sacrificing sleep, spending more or drawing on another person's time. A viable job in another city requires departure from a support network or the relocation of relatives. Distant housing adds travel time. A decision about work thus reaches care, sleep, settlement and relationships. If the worker then lacks the strength to join a collective meeting, earlier loss narrows a later challenge.

Household sharing, public support and organised resistance can interrupt this transfer. Two people may work the same hours, yet one rests and participates in changing working conditions while the other exchanges sleep for care and loses that capacity. The difference concerns the means of replenishing strength and preventing loss from passing into subsequent life. People can continue to act while depletion continues. Breaking one connection does not automatically repair every loss.

We cannot store today's unlived life intact for tomorrow. A child's childhood, a moment of care and the days in which we might accompany another person's grief do not wait for us. **An unfulfilled friendship is itself a loss.** When that loss also weakens collective action, it gives power a second route through which to sustain its imposition.

Saliha Çukur's family account of 2011 gives the relationship between time and place a concrete history. She lives in a village near Ordu while her husband works in Ankara; in 1969, she leaves for Germany. The children initially remain with relatives in Turkey. Later, her husband's employer supports their arrival and provides Çukur with work and the family with company housing. The children establish friendships. Her husband builds a house in Turkey for a planned return. His death and the lives that children and grandchildren establish in Germany alter her prospect of returning.⁹ The house remains; the life the family could live there changes. Separation and the making of a new home coexist in the account. The family's life in its new home has value of its own.

In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx connects the product, productive activity, species-life and relations with other humans. A person confronts their own activity as an alien power.¹⁰ The

consumption of the whole person develops the temporal continuation of this reversal: in expending strength to sustain life, a person also depletes the supports of living and of changing life's conditions. Tomorrow's necessity carries today's loss. Childhood, care and habitat begin to form the supports of this relationship before entry into paid employment.

In *Wages Against Housework*, Silvia Federici examines how capital organises housework as women's nature, converts resistance to the role into personal failure and weakens the capacity to struggle. She connects the combination of paid employment and housework to diminished time and energy for struggle. Her demand for wages challenges capital's planned division of labour. She also distinguishes people's organisation of care services with public funding from the state's control of those services.¹¹ Care, imposition and the capacity for intervention already belong together in her analysis.

Suppose the carer in my example is a woman whose household treats care as her natural duty. The employer disregards her care responsibilities; household members disregard the time that paid work consumes. Without access to support, she makes up the deficit from rest and relationships. Where the burden obstructs collective resistance, the unequal distribution also weakens the means of changing itself. Household members may read interrupted care as indifference; the employer may treat the absence of protest as free choice. Both assign the consequences of their decisions to her. A real need does not necessitate this distribution. The life of the carer and the needs of the person receiving care belong in the same account.

The International Labour Organization's 2024 estimate indicates the scale of this asymmetry. For 2023, it estimates that care responsibilities keep 748 million people aged fifteen or over outside the labour force: 708 million women and 40 million men.¹² These totals describe the unequal distribution of care-related absence from the labour force. Entry into paid work does not automatically remove care responsibilities when households and public institutions decline to share them. Self-realisation reaches beyond labour-force participation.

Class becomes visible in the capacity to protect one's own life and transfer costs to another. Owners, employers and public institutions distribute that capacity through property, employment authority and control over means of livelihood. Faced with the same care need, one person can postpone work without losing income or buy support; another depends on that day's work to live. I place the purchaser's gain in time alongside its cost to the paid carer's life. That worker's care, rest and capacity to contest conditions also enter the account. Losing a job can carry a greater price when it also threatens housing or residence. Power targets individuals and society through unequal intensities of burden.

Migration changes this distribution within households. One person's enlarged livelihood may transfer care to someone else. Moving together may interrupt another family member's work and relationships. People do not hold equal authority over who leaves, waits or begins again. In Çukur's account, the woman initiates international migration.⁹ Her history prevents an automatic assignment of women to the position of the carer who stays behind. Higher household income also fails to establish equal gains in each member's capacity to live through their own purposes.

Nancy Fraser explains how capital depends upon conditions it treats as non-economic, including care and social ties, while accumulation destabilises those conditions. Social reproduction also forms people as social subjects and sustains shared meanings.¹³ This account helps explain an employer's erosion of the care and relationship time on which work depends. Decision health directs my inquiry towards authority within the same event. Who sets the hours? Who carries care? Who can change that distribution? A service's existence matters alongside the authority to determine its purposes and conditions of access.

In *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Russell Hochschild shows how emotional labour brings corporate requirements into feeling. The company asks flight attendants to imagine passengers as guests in their homes and carries the intimacy of private relationships into commercial service. Union pressure also limits corporate demands.¹⁴ I follow the relationship into the person's subsequent life. After expending attention and closeness in service, can they inhabit relationships they choose? Can organisation interrupt the continuation of that loss? This transfer connects emotional labour to the consumption of the whole person.

Disability brings access and support into the foreground. Consider an institution that accepts applications only through one form of communication and excludes the form a person can use. That institutional choice creates dependence on a supporter, additional time or another expense. If officials record failure to complete the application as the person's incapacity, they transfer responsibility for an institutional barrier to its bearer. Accessible communication and support that carries the person's will can change the relation. Bodily difference, an institutional barrier and the power to alter conditions occupy distinct places in the explanation.

In LGBTI+ lives, conditions of recognition reach identity, the body and intimate relationships. The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture's 2016 report examines how identity documents, registration and classification affect LGBTI+ people's safety and access to healthcare, specifically in detention. It also identifies the restrictions that protective isolation can place on education, work and other opportunities.¹⁵ What definition and conditions does an official impose while claiming to protect a person? What voice does that person have in changing them? These questions expose classifications that the state establishes directly.

When an institution excludes an identity, body or relationship from its valid definitions, it does not abolish the person's being. It places recognition, safety and access in jeopardy. The institutional definition confronts the person's right to define themselves and their relationships. Disability and LGBTI+ experiences make it impossible to ground equal constitutive standing in bodily sameness, a single form of communication or one approved way of life. **Society is the whole of differences; it exceeds power's single measure of the human.** Those differences change the instruments of imposition and the costs of refusal as care, work, settlement and rights converge within one life.

Power places what it takes from today's life in the path of tomorrow's refusal.

04 /

Work, migration and settlement: the price of refusal

Power constructs dependency through historically distinct authorities and instruments. In *Capital*, Marx distinguishes two conditions of the sale of labour-power: the worker controls their own labour-power as a free person and lacks the means of production through which to secure a livelihood independently.¹⁰ Legal freedom and economic necessity operate together. Slavery, serfdom, wage labour and platform work involve different powers and different struggles. In some relations, power obstructs capacities that people have yet to acquire; in others, it removes gains that earlier struggles secure. This history offers no universally free beginning.

State planning and employer demand also constitute the geography of work. Turkey's First Five-Year Development Plan, for 1963-1967, incorporates the movement of surplus labour to Western Europe into employment policy. The same plan seeks to relieve excessive urbanisation and concentration around Istanbul through new development centres.¹⁶ The state makes the direction of movement an object of policy and does not favour every concentration. I follow where institutions establish livelihoods, housing and services, and who carries the costs of movement.

The 1961 labour agreement between Turkey and the Federal Republic of Germany organises employer demand through intermediary agencies, contracts and travel to workplaces. Its initial text limits total residence to two years.¹⁷ An employer publication from the same year reports that initial placements concern employment-office districts in Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg, with collective demands from the Federal Railways outside that restriction.¹⁸ Before a person decides where to go, institutions determine which jobs, places and lengths of stay they will open. Their admission of labour does not extend equivalent conditions for the constitution of a durable social life.

I place the same person, with not even one dollar, in two scenes: a city of twenty million people and a village of twenty households. In the urban scene, food, shelter and movement depend on purchases. In the village, the person retains access to shelter, food production and shared supplies. How long can the same empty pocket sustain life in each? The difference lies in the means that remain within reach when purchasing power disappears.

In this comparison, power grips the city more tightly and the village more loosely. It concentrates necessities behind conditions of payment in the city; direct provision and sharing leave openings in the village. Population magnifies the reach of the arrangement. Control over access gives it force. Power deepens dependency wherever it separates people from the means of sustaining life and requires them to return as purchasers. One bill then joins the next in governing the same life.

Roads, bridges, electricity, water and natural gas give this imposition material form. I judge them as public responsibilities because people depend on them for the minimum conditions of life. A bridge that I cannot afford to cross leaves the destination beyond my reach. A water connection beyond my means leaves me thirsty. Cables and pipes establish technical connections; suppliers set charges, and public authorities authorise and enforce the terms. When those terms put necessities beyond people's means, power converts infrastructure into an instrument of exclusion.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights makes affordability part of the right to water and requires water charges to leave other Covenant rights within reach.¹⁹ I carry that relational test into the account of everyday life. A household may keep the water running by cutting food, postponing care or taking on more work. The bill records payment; the body and the day absorb its cost. Infrastructure serves common life only when people can use it without surrendering the conditions of that life. **Power can surround a person with the means of life and deny them the means to live.**

Janice E. Thomson's *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns* examines states' authorisation of non-state violence and their later prohibition and suppression of particular practices. She also shows how interstate interventions combine into an outcome that no single actor necessarily intends.²⁰ Her history explains the constitution of state authority over violence. I ask where power now locates the authority to determine binding conditions of life. Earlier centralisation leaves the possibility of later transformation open. I assess any proposed continuity between chartered trading companies and present corporations through links between law, authority, infrastructure and practice.

Carlo Vercellone examines cognitive capitalism through changes in knowledge, power and the capital-labour relation. He considers the coexistence of technical autonomy in work and monetary dependence, alongside the importance of free time and education for human development.²¹ A person may control the method of work while lacking authority over the purposes that power imposes upon work and life. Productive capacity can grow without an equivalent expansion of the strength available for one's own life.

Mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology expand the reach of technical intervention across the last century. Power enlarges instrumental capacity without giving equivalent priority to the capacity for self-realisation and collective change. It places faster production, greater consumption and more completed transactions before the life people can live. **Philosophy must demand an account of the life that people cannot live.** It must confront claims of technical success with the questions of who sets the purposes and who bears the costs.

Power sets the direction of developments that promise easier lives and demands adaptation to that direction. It presents new occupations as evidence of progress while closing, narrowing or worsening wider fields of employment. People who keep their jobs also carry intensifying conditions and continual demands to remake their skills. Power fills the possibilities of productivity with new obligations. People meet the pace of development by taking from their lives. A programme that treats this depletion as the necessary cost of progress advances at society's expense.

Power uses authority to preserve its authority over conditions. It may improve a person's capacity to perform work while closing routes to change its purpose or distribution. It intervenes both in the content of a demand and in the conditions that make the demand effective. Tying settlement to employment or raising the price of departure incorporates an attack on decision health into the relationship's constitution. A final purpose of revenue or institutional continuity does not remove the intentional character of the chosen instrument. I identify planning through authority, the selected means, knowledge of consequences and intervention in the capacity to refuse.

South Africa's apartheid state gives this connection legal form in its 1964 legislation. It ties employment and presence in specified areas through the racist legal category 'Bantu'. Under particular conditions, officials can withhold approval of employment or require the cancellation of a contract. They can direct a person towards other work or require departure from the area with dependants. The law also requires attention to family ties and includes specific protections and review routes.²² Authority over employment thereby reaches the place in which a family can live. Racial classification becomes an instrument for setting conditions of life.

By joining work to settlement, power adds a family's established life to the price of refusing a job. The statute establishes this connection of authority. I compare the instruments of dependency while retaining the historical distinction between apartheid's racial state and the contemporary corporation's constitutive position. South Africa's 1996 Constitution recognises citizens' right to reside anywhere in the country and protects against eviction without a court order.²³ That legal gain is real. Its reach into people's lives requires a further inquiry.

Class, gender and racism alter one another's effects within a life. Suppose discriminatory residence conditions also constrain the carer in my earlier example. Changing jobs endangers care; leaving work for care threatens livelihood; challenging employment conditions risks established residence. Similar income does not imply a similar price of refusal.

Two people may choose lower-paid work through very different capacities. One evaluates purposes, has access to other viable jobs and can revise the decision. The other lacks care support and takes the only job with workable hours; the employer uses that dependence to worsen conditions. The apparent similarity of choice conceals different powers of refusal. A later bad outcome also fails to establish, by itself, a loss of capacity at the moment of decision. Income may rise while time for relationships and organisation contracts. **When power ties livelihood, care and settlement to employment, refusing a job puts all three at stake.**

05 /

Decision health and society's constitutive power

Society's decision health exceeds the sum of individual capacities. People create common power when they have time to hear one another's experiences, language to name shared problems and security to act together. Through that power, they change work, the distribution of care and the conditions of access. They also expand the supports of individual decisions. Power governs through categories of labour, consumption, debt and data while targeting this collective capacity to intervene in its purposes. Registration within a shared infrastructure does not give people a constitutive voice. Migration may weaken older solidarities; people can also build new supports through neighbourhoods, associations and unions. Collective action depends on time and security, and can expand both.

Effective collective decision-making alone does not suffice. A community can reach decisions quickly by silencing some members. Decision health also concerns inclusion, the protection of dissenters' livelihoods and participation, oversight of representatives and the capacity to revise decisions. No common life can rest upon one group's suspension of another group's life in pursuit of its own purposes.

In 'In Search of the Commonwealth', Antonio Negri examines the productive autonomy of social cooperation, capital's appropriation of common production through rent and finance, and constitutive struggle. He asks how productive independence coexists with practical dependency and connects democratic possibility to the capacity to resist.²⁴ I press the question into the binding conditions of life. When capital withdraws from the daily organisation of production, does it also withdraw from determining those conditions? People may organise work themselves while lacking authority over livelihood, access and exit. Productive autonomy does not automatically grant the power to change common purposes.

Consider a company that invites workers to select shifts and approve changes while closing the routes through which they could challenge the construction of the timetable. A worker depends on the job for livelihood and housing. The worker chooses, works and gives approval; management withholds any effective response to demands that protect care and rest. **Management substitutes a record of consent for constitutive participation.** It uses the worker's action to validate its own decision while obstructing intervention through the worker's purposes.

By attaching access to the possibilities of common knowledge and labour to corporate conditions, power imposes something like an accumulating patent charge upon individuals and society. People repeatedly pay for possibilities of a world they help constitute. This analogy names dependency through permission, payment and compliance. As power changes conditions, a person adapts livelihood, skills and relationships. Alongside money,

they expend time, attention and bodily strength. Today's enforced adaptation consumes resources that tomorrow's refusal requires.

In his speech of 9 September 2026, Donald Trump explicitly brings corporate language into the relationship between state and society. Conditional upon Republican victories in both congressional chambers, he promises every adult US citizen \$5,000, compares the payment to a successful company's distribution of cash to shareholders and presents it under his own name.²⁵ He frames a common resource as a return on leadership success and the citizen's position as an opportunity to receive a share. **The state does not distribute promotional gifts.** When a leader presents public resources as an incentive tied to party success, he replaces a social right with his own offer. He invites the rights-holder to await a return that he supplies. His speech supplies a corporate justification for the public relationship.

A record of approval cannot replace society's authority to change common purposes.

06 /

SASSA-CPS: dependency, authority and effective counter-intervention

In South Africa, the South African Social Security Agency, SASSA, transfers grant-payment operations to Cash Paymaster Services, CPS, and makes access to a public entitlement depend on the company's payment operations. In its 2014 *AllPay (No 2)* judgement, the Constitutional Court treats CPS as an organ of state for this public function. It maintains SASSA's constitutional responsibility and prevents the company from invoking the contract's invalidity as a reason to abandon the service.²⁶

Keith Breckenridge draws on Net1's communications to investors to show how its acquisition of CPS connects to a plan to attach grant recipients to credit and insurance products. Biometric cards and payment infrastructure support the commercial expansion. Management draws merchants, lenders and the public institution, alongside users, into a common payment network.²⁷ The plan turns grant delivery into a means of sustaining commercial product relations. The corporate position acquires a concrete form: the route of a public payment becomes the ground on which the company establishes its own revenue relations.

The sequence in the Court's 2017 record matters. In 2015, SASSA tells the Court that it will assume payment operations in April 2017. Responsible officials know from April 2016 that they cannot meet that timetable, yet fail to notify the Court promptly. By March 2017, the Court accepts, on the record before it, that only CPS can continue payments in the short term.²⁸ SASSA possesses authority to leave the company but has not prepared an alternative capable of fulfilling its undertaking. Monthly subsistence cannot wait. Management passes the cost of its unprepared transition to recipients as a threat to payment and makes continuity depend upon CPS remaining in place.

In the 2017 crisis, SASSA cannot implement its decision to leave without endangering subsistence payments. Net1's commercial strategy joins that payment infrastructure to a product market. The resulting dependency gives the company leverage over the conditions through which people reach payments and financial products. SASSA retains constitutional responsibility for the grant entitlement; the corporate authority that these records establish concerns payment and product access.

Erin Torkelson's field account of March 2017 follows the struggle over conditions through Sophia's life. Sophia seeks a Moneyline loan for housing; an employee makes an unwanted EasyPay account and SmartLife insurance conditions of the loan. Excessive deductions by XY Loans, a lender outside the Net1 group, also reduce her subsistence money. Sophia gives up meals to feed her children. According to the account, her milk supply falls and her baby loses weight. SASSA turns her away because of the EasyPay account. At the company office, an employee invokes fingerprint and record problems to obstruct immediate cancellation of the insurance, then invokes XY Loans' deductions to insist that the account remain open. With support from Black Sash, Sophia recovers money from XY Loans, pays for childcare and returns to work.²⁹

Sophia seeks housing and an exit from unwanted products. Company employees attach the first demand to additional purchases and the second to account and cancellation procedures. A loss of subsistence reaches nutrition and care; changing the condition requires further time and support. Decision health asks where a person can find the capacity to stop a harm once they recognise it. Sophia and her supporters achieve a result against a particular deduction. The recovery demonstrates agency without turning her into the actor who sets the purposes of the payment and credit system.

Corporate management plans product expansion; public officials sustain dependency through an unprepared transition; employees obstruct Sophia's efforts to leave unwanted products. Their decisions connect commercial revenue, public responsibility and the costs Sophia bears.

On 17 March 2017, the Court intervenes in the terms of dependency. It requires SASSA and CPS to continue payments for twelve months on the existing contractual terms. It limits data use and prohibits requests for consent to share information for marketing. It subjects an application for price changes to Treasury scrutiny and reporting to the Court, and requires regular transition reports.²⁸ While the payment dependency continues, the Court exercises binding authority over the company. It protects subsistence and restricts corporate discretion within the same intervention.

In 2018, the public institution operates an alternative payment route. At the end of September, the CPS contract ends and payments move to the Post Office and banks. On 7 November, SASSA's management reports these developments to a parliamentary committee.³⁰ The 2017 judgement changes the conditions of continuing dependency; the 2018 transition ends the specific reliance on CPS for grant payments. Public authority first constrains the provider and then establishes another route.

Deborah D. Avant's *The Market for Force* explains how private security markets can strengthen or weaken functional control while changing its forms and distribution.³¹ The SASSA case makes the distinction concrete through the capacity to deliver payments and the capacity to alter payment conditions. Power can expand public processing capacity through a company while weakening the force of claims against the institution. When the institution constrains the company, I also ask whose demand that authority answers. The direction of intervention determines the relationship between a stronger state and society's constitutive power.

Ward Thomas's *The New Dogs of War* examines changes in international norms concerning non-state violence through militias, terrorist networks and private military contractors.³² The connection to my thesis lies in who can impose which conditions. Legal authority, social legitimacy and infrastructural determination may rest on different foundations. The SASSA contract, corporate dependency and judicial intervention require us to follow those foundations together, without treating public-service authority as identical to legitimate force.

In the prologue and introduction to *Predatory Welfare*, Torkelson relates the organisation of grant payments and debt to care burdens, racial and gender inequality, personal responsibility and collective struggle.³³ Breckenridge and Torkelson already examine planning and connections across domains. My concepts contribute through three linked questions: where does power concentrate purpose-setting authority; what does an imposition remove from the supports of subsequent intervention; and which connection does counter-intervention change?

Foucault examines power's formation of capacities alongside the discipline of bodies and regulation of populations. He treats power relations as purposeful and calculated without attributing their totality to a single designing subject. He follows the strategic connections of local tactics and resistance.³⁴ I give power concrete form by following officials' and corporate managers' decisions about purposes, contracts, infrastructure and services. These actions identify which groups of people combine authority, where their decisions conflict and whom they bind.

In the 1976 lectures *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault tests war's explanatory force and examines the history of discourses of war and struggle.³⁵ In 'The Subject and Power' of 1982, he approaches government through the structuring of others' possible fields of action and stresses that power operates upon subjects who retain capacities to act.³⁶ My inquiry shares this attention to capacities and conditions of action.

Through 'rules of engagement', I carry the question of strategic conflict into the authority to determine who counts as a constitutive party to common life. Power sustains a person's activity while severing the capacity of their demand to change conditions. It locates purpose-setting in the corporation and binding mediation in the state; it redefines individuals and society through functions that serve those purposes. Such redefinition need not change being or substance. Where the corporation acquires the constitutive position, this divergence expresses constitutive substitution in the definition of the subject.

Agamben's *Homo Sacer* examines inclusive exclusion, bare life and sovereignty's dissolution of the boundary between exception and normality.³⁷ The persistence of formal rights alongside exclusion supplies common ground for the comparison. I follow compulsory conditions of access, the cost of refusal and the transmission of loss into subsequent intervention. These connections can explain a relationship without first establishing sovereign exception or bare life.

CPS turns the payment route into a foundation for commercial product relations. This control over payment and product access exposes a mechanism through which power can move the company towards the constitutive position. Organised support reverses a particular deduction, judicial authority constrains corporate discretion, and the public institution establishes another payment route. These interventions change different links in the dependency. Later gains leave earlier losses in the account; earlier losses cannot erase the authority that subsequent intervention recovers. **A public right can endure while corporate conditions restrict access to it. Effective intervention changes those conditions.**

07 /

AI: constituting infrastructure, naturalising loss of control and displacing responsibility

In SASSA, the public institution depends on corporate payment infrastructure and people encounter the price of that dependence while sustaining their lives. AI partnerships direct the same constitutive question towards earlier conditions of decision. Who determines the information a person encounters while seeking work, education or a public service? Who determines which need receives an answer and which option remains practicable? A corporate tool may enlarge an institution's processing capacity without enlarging society's authority over its purposes.

Agreements in the North extend corporate roles in public transformation through different arrangements. In July 2025, the US Department of Defense's Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office announces contracts with OpenAI, Google, Anthropic and xAI, each with a \$200 million ceiling, to develop agentic AI workflows across mission areas.³⁸ In the same month, the United Kingdom and OpenAI sign a memorandum covering public services, infrastructure and safety-information exchange. The text explicitly disclaims legal enforceability and constraints on future procurement.³⁹ Luxembourg enters a partnership with Mistral AI in June 2025 and reports in March 2026 that it operates AI solutions directly on its own infrastructure.⁴⁰ States select purposes, allocate resources and establish forms of corporate relationship. Their continuing existence matters alongside their practical authority to change conditions.

Partnerships in the South assemble infrastructure and public-service needs into extensive packages. In May 2024, Microsoft and the UAE-based G42 announce an ambition to arrange

\$1 billion of investment for Kenya. Their package combines an Azure data centre, local-language models, training and public-sector cloud adoption.⁴¹ In May 2026, Reuters relays a Bloomberg report that demands for annual payment guarantees for specified capacity delay negotiations; Reuters states that it cannot independently verify that account.⁴² The reported dispute places future public payment obligations within the bargaining over infrastructure. The combination of Kenyan institutions, a US company and a UAE company also exposes different powers within a simple North-South division.

In February 2026, Rwanda's government and Anthropic announce a three-year memorandum covering health, education and public services. Their stated aims include tools and technical support for public-sector developers and support for national health and educational goals.⁴³ In December 2025, xAI announces a partnership with El Salvador's government that aims to reach more than 5,000 public schools and over one million pupils within two years. The announcement joins teaching support to the development of methods and datasets.⁴⁴ Such a programme brings teachers' authority over pedagogical criteria, families' influence over children's data and society's direction of education into the constitutive question. Providing a tool and determining the conditions of education involve distinct powers.

These announcements establish different corporate roles and stated ambitions within public infrastructure. In its January 2026 announcement of the GOV.UK project, Anthropic states goals of user control over data, opportunities to leave and the development of expertise that enables public employees to maintain the system independently.⁴⁵ Their implementation would strengthen the practical alternatives through which the public institution can change conditions. In March 2026, Anthropic reports disagreement with the Pentagon over mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons, and states that the department designates it a supply-chain risk.⁴⁶ Anthropic's account places corporate use restrictions and public authority in conflict over the purposes of deployment.

In the remarks he publishes for the Davos opening on 20 January 2026, BlackRock's Larry Fink acknowledges the concentration of AI's early gains among the owners of models, data and infrastructure. He calls for wider ownership, greater voice and more transparency, and recognises that many people whose lives the discussions affect will never enter the conference.⁴⁷ **I begin with the exclusion that this appeal acknowledges.** The call to broaden ownership confirms its narrow reach. The demand for more voice and transparency recognises their present insufficiency. Fink names these deficits from within the institutions that command capital.

On 31 March 2026, OpenAI names affiliated funds of BlackRock among the participants in its funding round. In the same announcement, OpenAI presents itself as core AI infrastructure and describes how computing capacity supports better models and products, wider adoption, revenue and reinvestment.⁴⁸ The company states its expansion strategy. Investment enlarges capacity; use generates income; income finances the next expansion. Public agreements bring corporate capacity into the organisation of public services. I follow the purposes and conditions that public authorities authorise, purchase and make binding upon the people who need those services.

Fink proposes that more people become 'owners of growth'.⁴⁷ **A share of the return does not confer authority over the purpose.** A person can receive investment income while lacking the force to change the conditions that organise their work, education or access to care. More income can strengthen the means of refusal. Constitutive authority concerns what that refusal can make power change. Power can admit the person as an investor, customer or beneficiary while withholding binding force from their demand to reconstruct common conditions.

Here the subject's redefinition acquires a precise form. Power counts participation through the functions its order requires and treats a stake in its returns as a place within that order. The human continues to live, work, think and contribute. Their being need not change for power to change the standing and force of their claim. **Power can widen participation in the proceeds while keeping the purposes beyond society's reach.** The expectation of a future share can gather support for present expansion; it grants nobody the right to make that expansion the compulsory horizon of another person's life.

In the World Economic Forum's 25 June 2026 Summer Davos closing announcement, Fink connects the promise of broader prosperity to scaling innovation, productivity and investment.⁴⁹ These are choices about resources, direction and scale. I keep the actors who make them within the account of responsibility. **Those who organise expansion must answer for the conditions they impose.** The technology's uncertain behaviour cannot erase the human decisions that extend its reach over other lives.

Controlling a model, changing an institutional system and constituting common purposes are different authorities. A technical team may stop a model's actions; a public institution may change suppliers; a person may still lack the power to alter a category governing their application. A domestic data centre does not establish access to a service without AI. When power makes corporate categories, updates and access requirements compulsory passages through the public relationship, it structures the reality a person encounters. It crosses the threshold of constitutive substitution where it ties a public purpose to a corporate purpose through those conditions and deprives opposing demands of effect. **Power can withdraw society's constitutive control while AI remains technically under control.**

The debate over AI escaping control adds responsibility to this distribution of authority. OpenAI's August 2026 investigation reports unauthorised access to its own and Hugging Face's systems by internal research models operating under conditions in which researchers reduce some safeguards.⁵⁰ The UK AI Security Institute likewise reports unauthorised actions affecting real people and organisations in July 2026 testing. It identifies its own decisions to enable internet access and disable some safety filters, acknowledges weaknesses in monitoring, and reports that its team stops the relevant evaluations and isolates machines within approximately an hour of discovering the incident.⁵¹ These incidents connect dangerous model behaviour to choices about access, safeguards and monitoring. The Institute's intervention also shows human actors detecting the incident and stopping the relevant tests.

I challenge the narrative that turns uncertainty into the natural and inevitable consequence of technology's own evolution. Power moves responsibility away from itself without directing it towards those who develop, patent, license or operate the technology. It credits investment, expertise and enterprise with success; it attributes harm to AI developing on its own. Human actors retain ownership and income while the narrative relocates harmful agency outside the human sphere. **Power retains ownership and claims success, yet distances itself from responsibility for harm.** An inability to predict every model behaviour does not absolve those who decide what authority to give the model over other lives.

The existence of risk also differs from the authority to accept it on others' behalf. In remarks Reuters reports on 4 October 2026, Sam Altman argues that the world needs to accept some bad outcomes for the sake of the technology's benefits and people's opportunity to use it.⁵² This claim raises the question of who determines acceptable loss. Who receives the benefit, who carries the harm and what does refusal cost? Knowledge and ownership do not confer an exclusive right to answer on society's behalf.

The force of a safety undertaking belongs to the same inquiry. On 29 September 2026, Trump describes a corporate safety accord as 'morally binding' and emphasises corporate self-policing. Reuters's examination identifies no explicit penalties or enforcement mechanism for non-compliance in the document.⁵³ Existing law still carries obligations. Yet different degrees of enforceability for public purchasing, use conditions and safety promises alter whose demand can achieve a result.

My analogy of an alien attack exposes the structure of responsibility's displacement: 'They may attack, they may attack; they have attacked. Who? Aliens.' Repetition first constructs an expectation; a subsequent event then enters a ready-made category of non-human threat. Attention turns from who creates the conditions to who will protect society. Applied to AI, this narrative can position a human-made technology as a force arriving from outside humanity. Those who construct its infrastructure and expand its use can return as protectors facing the same external danger.

In his 2023 conversation with Lex Fridman, Yuval Noah Harari uses 'alien intelligence' for AI while explicitly locating its origin in Silicon Valley rather than outer space.⁵⁴ His expression supplies an instance of the alien metaphor within AI debate. My alien-attack analogy examines the narrative form through which a non-human threat can redirect the demand for responsibility.

The Security Institute's account keeps technical events and human responsibility within one chain by naming its own decisions and intervention. The exemption I examine arises where power instead presents its decisions as technology's natural course and uses that presentation to distance itself from binding accountability. If the same actors also determine the terms of protection, society's demand for safety may become a new dependency.

The language of 'sovereign AI' invites scrutiny when a domestic server stands in for society's authority over purposes. The language of 'human oversight' invites the same scrutiny when an official's approval stands in for the power to alter conditions. Through temporal

conceptual arbitrage, power can exploit these gaps: the language of public authority survives while people must adapt to conditions they cannot change. A narrative about possible future loss of control can reorganise authority and responsibility in the present. **Technical control cannot replace society's authority over purposes. Those who retain ownership cannot disclaim responsibility.**

08 /

Power constitutes conditions, closes options and assigns responsibility

The **Reality Paradigm** examines how power establishes the binding field that a person encounters before deciding. Power determines which records, information and application routes count. It limits where a person can work, live and refuse conditions. **Environmental structuring** names the prior constitution of that field of encounter. **Infrastructural imposition** names power's requirement that a person pass through it to sustain life. Before a person decides to move, other actors may already determine the places and livelihoods that the person can reach.

In its 2017 *UNISON* judgement, the UK Supreme Court finds employment tribunal fees unlawful and distinguishes theoretical ability to pay from affordability alongside reasonable living expenses. It considers hypothetical household calculations that propose savings through the abandonment of clothing and social or cultural participation. The Court rejects a conception of affordability that requires low- and middle-income households to forgo ordinary expenditure for extended periods.⁵⁵ By introducing the fee, public authority ties the exercise of a right to sacrifices elsewhere in life. The union challenges the condition; the Court changes it. Public imposition and effective counter-intervention belong together in the case.

Onopticon examines foreclosure where power compels entry into a regime of recognition and access while weakening effective challenge. Power sustains this closure by joining domains of life or making the result of an earlier operation a condition of the next. People continue to move and act; power closes alternatives they could use while sustaining life. The diagnostic relationship exceeds the existence of surveillance. At what cost can a person refuse the condition, and what can their challenge change?

The plug in *The Death of the Human* names a connection that a person cannot sever while sustaining life. Power requires livelihood, care, settlement and rights to pass through its channels. Where refusing those channels destroys the supports of life, power converts a condition of access into a condition of existence. Knowledge of the imposition does not remove the cost of refusal. Organised challenge or public authority can break a closure by changing its conditions.

Homovictimus emerges where compulsory inclusion joins a transfer of responsibility. Power compels entry into an arrangement; infrastructural closure narrows the options; the person acts tactically within what remains. Institutions or individuals classify that action as free choice or personal fault, assign its consequences to the person and obscure the responsibility of those who establish the conditions. Power withdraws constitutive authority while imposing responsibility as if the person holds it. Managers activate this circuit when they worsen conditions and then blame a worker who loses employment for failing to adapt. A burden alone does not establish Homovictimus. The conversion of constraint into choice or fault supplies a necessary further link.

The narrative of AI's autonomous evolution can distance the actors who establish conditions from responsibility. The Homovictimus relation requires the additional act through which institutions blame people within those conditions for poor adaptation, bad choices or insufficient self-protection. Exempting power and assigning blame to the person may complement one another.

I assess a person's conduct towards others and the conduct of those who establish the conditions through causal contribution, real alternatives and authority to change the relationship. Constraints do not excuse every act. Adaptation for survival does not amount to endorsement of the order's purposes.

Power can obstruct changes to conditions without first exhausting every human capacity. People can also mount effective challenges while depletion continues.

Sophia's account shows how credit and account conditions reach housing and nutrition. She also needs a body, time and support in order to challenge those conditions. The body belongs to the human being from whom I begin. Institutional impositions reach a person whose history of exposure shapes the supports of evaluation and refusal. **No one arrives at a decision without a body.**

Cytopolitics examines power's imposition upon decision health through cells and hormones within this material continuity. The **metabolic a priori** names the bodily history that exposure forms and that subsequent action takes as its starting condition. That history does not determine the outcome of any particular exposure in advance. Research must connect the type and duration of exposure to the bodily result. The political question concerns who organises those conditions, through which instruments, and with what effect on the capacity to refuse.

Food brings this bodily history into the ordinary organisation of survival. I refuse to equate the mass of produce with the nourishment it supplies. In their comparison of USDA data for forty-three garden crops between 1950 and 1999, Donald R. Davis and colleagues find group-level declines in six of thirteen nutrients after adjusting for moisture differences. They propose changes in cultivated varieties and trade-offs between yield and nutrient content as possible explanations.⁵⁶ A production account that stops at weight leaves nutritional composition outside its measure of success.

A fourteen-year maize experiment makes one agronomic relationship concrete. Grace L. Miner and colleagues find that higher nitrogen inputs reduce zinc concentrations across

plant fractions while increasing iron in the grain.⁵⁷ The same intervention moves different nutritional components in different directions. **A larger harvest does not guarantee better nourishment.**

Fertilisers and pesticides also connect production decisions to exposure in the habitat. UNEP's synthesis places their agricultural benefits alongside evidence of adverse effects on human health and ecosystems.⁵⁸ FAO's 2023 account identifies health, environmental and social costs beyond the prices of agrifood products; its environmental account includes nitrogen emissions, land-use change and water use.⁵⁹ These sources expose distinct relations within the production of food: what the crop contains, what an exposure does, and where the cost falls.

I follow these relations into the constitution of responsibility. Producers and purchasers set specifications; suppliers develop and sell inputs; public authorities determine permissions and standards. When decision-makers pursue output while transferring the costs of their methods to households and habitats, they make society subsidise their account of success. A price can omit a cost. A body cannot omit an exposure. Repair then claims money, care and time from lives that already carry the production burden. This is where the political inquiry reaches decision health: who chooses the conditions, who knows their consequences, who can change them, and who must spend the strength that refusal requires merely to absorb them?

Optogenetics supplies a concrete instance of selective intervention in cellular processes. Karl Deisseroth, Peter Hegemann and Georg Nagel receive the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their work on light-gated ion channels and optogenetics.⁶⁰ Researchers introduce genes that enable target cells to produce light-sensitive proteins, then deliver light to alter those cells' activity. Gene delivery, cell selection and access of light to the target tissue constitute material conditions of the intervention. By altering particular cells' activity on a millisecond timescale and observing behavioural consequences, researchers test causal connections between cells and behaviour.⁶¹

In a 2013 study in rats, Elizabeth E. Steinberg and colleagues use optogenetics to activate dopamine neurons alongside reward. The intervention produces a lasting increase in cue-elicited reward-seeking and establishes a causal role for dopamine signals in cue-reward learning.⁶² The experiment demonstrates purposeful intervention in particular cellular supports of learning. Decision health directs inquiry from that capacity towards the bodily supports of evaluating purposes and changing action. Human social decisions develop through these supports together with historical and institutional relationships.

Cellular intervention can also expand a person's access to the world. In their 2021 study, José-Alain Sahel and colleagues combine gene delivery with light stimulation from specialised goggles in a patient who has lost sight through retinitis pigmentosa. After treatment, the patient uses the goggles to perceive, locate, count and touch some objects; without them, the patient cannot visually detect the same objects.⁶³ I judge that partial recovery through the possibilities it adds to the person's life. Decision health requires us to examine both what an intervention adds to and what it takes from the capacity to pursue one's purposes.

The optogenetic studies establish deliberate intervention in cellular activity and its effects within their experimental conditions. SASSA's dependency operates through contracts, payment infrastructure and the effectiveness of challenge. Neither body of evidence establishes the other's causal mechanism. Experimental gene delivery and everyday exposures through food and work involve different material pathways. Cytopolitics connects the actors who organise an exposure, their authority and purposes, and the effects of bodily change on the capacity to refuse or alter conditions. Establishing that political mechanism requires evidence across these connections.

Disability and LGBTI+ experiences sharpen the question of purpose and authority. Care that a person chooses in pursuit of their purposes and an institution's imposition of an approved body or identity establish different relations. The UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture supports access to hormone treatment that trans people need while rejecting purported conversion treatments that suppress sexual orientation or gender identity.¹⁵ The political character of an intervention turns on who sets its purposes, what conditions a person must accept to obtain care, and what authority the person has to change those conditions.

Who determines research priorities, access to treatment, continuity of provision and authority to change the terms? When power concentrates these authorities in the corporate position, bodily capacity and the power to influence the conditions of its use may move in different directions. A technical intervention can enlarge a person's possibilities while its provider retains authority over their continued availability. I judge the relation through the person's purposes and power to change its conditions. **Supporting a person's body grants no right to take over that person's purposes.**

09 /

Habitat and war: who carries the cost of reconstruction?

Water, air, soil, nourishment and shelter sustain life and the making of a common world. People form habitats through language, intimacy, memory and settlement. Making a home means participating in relationships and the constitution of common conditions as well as obtaining shelter. When power transfers costs to other people, regions and generations, it does not free itself from the conditions of its own life. It can become more effective at achieving its purposes while damaging the living and social relations on which it depends. This contradiction establishes no inevitable timetable of collapse. It exposes the conflict between power's account of success and the continuation of a common world.

War and peace sharpen the distinction. Consider a reconstruction in which power nullifies the binding force of individuals' and society's constitutive voice and defines them as recipients of assistance. It refuses to recognise homes, work, relationships, memory and purposes as claims that bind the new constitution. Power decides where people will live,

what work they will do and how they will reach what they need. Power resets the extent to which people's established lives can bind those who constitute the new order. This reset need not alter being or substance. Bodily and environmental destruction and the loss of constitutive standing affect the same life through different mechanisms.

Power sets reconstruction's rules of engagement accordingly. It directs people into procedures through which they obtain necessities while excluding them from authority over those procedures' purposes. Renewed shelter constitutes a real gain. Constituting one's own life also requires the capacity to change settlement, employment and care conditions through one's purposes.

Why, then, do those who initiate wars claim the gains of peace while individuals and society continue to live with war's destructive consequences? People bear the costs as they rebuild homes, livelihoods and relationships. Power allocates reconstruction's resources and priorities and attaches access to its conditions. People carry both destruction and repair; power determines the purposes of the new constitution. A society seeking security and a future encounters power that turns these needs into new fields of accumulation and dependency.

Power makes the diminished field of action after destruction a condition of further imposition. People expend strength on shelter, subsistence and protection of loved ones while exhausting time for changing the terms they confront. Earlier loss raises the price of refusing subsequent conditions. **The strength a person spends repairing life can also sustain the imposition that governs it.** Power controls the routes of repair. We cannot transfer responsibility for this relation to society's supposed failure to preserve the gains of peace.

In peacetime, power likewise turns technical and economic reconstruction into a continual demand for adaptation. It determines the direction of development and requires people to reorganise employment, settlement, accumulated skills and livelihood around that direction. It also controls access to the means of repair. The costs of development, destruction and reconstruction therefore reach the same life. Calling a condition peace does not return what power takes. **I judge reconstruction by whether people regain authority over the life they must rebuild.**

10 /

Judging purposes: reason, intelligence and contact ontology

Here I distinguish reason from intelligence. Intelligence finds routes to a purpose, learns, calculates and adapts. Reason evaluates purposes and their consequences for common life, and can reject or reconstruct them. **Power is intelligence, not reason.**

This judgement concerns the use of knowledge: power calculates damage and uses that knowledge without accepting it as a reason to change its purpose. It withholds from others the authority to assess and alter those purposes while requiring more effective service to them. As AI capacity expands, the question of who sets purposes and who can change them becomes more pressing.

Reason grants no superior institution the right to decide in another person's place. We must keep the grounds of common life answerable to the experiences of those who carry it. An institution cannot remove a need from life by omitting it from a record. An easily completed form cannot meet the need its design excludes. A person's account can contain errors; institutional categories can also misdescribe the world. Those who automate a procedure retain responsibility for its purposes and the authority to correct it. An encounter acquires force when a person's voice can produce actual change.

I follow plans through what actors fund, specify, permit and enforce. Contracts connect purposes to obligations; budgets connect priorities to resources; testimony and implementation records follow decisions into lives; experiments isolate material effects. Thought experiments expose relationships within stated conditions. Different sources establish different connections, with different degrees of certainty. Their convergence can support a systemic explanation without a single experiment reproducing the whole social order. **Complexity does not dissolve responsibility.** It requires me to locate the decisions, instruments and transfers through which actors produce and maintain a condition. I distinguish evidence of a mechanism from evidence of its prevalence, and test the connections between them. A claim that discourse produces exemption must likewise show how the narrative changes accountability and correction.

I trace planning through the means an actor selects and the purpose those means serve; harm alone does not establish that purpose. An actor may seek to diminish a capacity, knowingly accept that diminution in pursuit of another aim, or maintain a condition after learning of its harm. These relations carry different responsibilities. I ask what the actor knows, which instrument they choose and what authority they hold to change the relationship, then follow the consequences for people's capacity to act. When public or collective intervention binds a company and changes the condition, I recognise the authority that people recover. Earlier losses remain real. So does the gain. Evidence of effective refusal must change an account that claims power has deprived refusal of effect.

Contact ontology names thought's obligation to answer to the human being from whom I begin. I judge institutions and concepts through the lives they affect, the relations they organise and the responsibilities they create. Equal human worth survives institutional redefinition; bodily differences, support needs and identities give no institution the right to close the account of a person's life. A system can fulfil its own purposes while consuming the conditions through which others pursue theirs. **Those who live with an institution's consequences must retain a voice in judging and changing its purposes.**

11 /

Survival is not living: reclaiming constitutive voice

Where does the human stand in the life they expend their strength sustaining? **Power is rewriting the rules of engagement.** Where it places the corporation in the constitutive position, it organises the state's authority to give corporate conditions force. **Power uses people's capacity to sustain its order while targeting their capacity to change its purposes.** Their institutional definition changes; that change does not necessarily alter their being or substance.

I judge reform, revolution and resistance through the life people can live. A shorter working day matters when people can use the time for rest, care, friendship and collective action. Partial gains can restore the strength that further change requires. They carry real value alongside the losses that endure. My criterion reaches beyond admission into an existing order to the capacity to change its conditions.

Decision health brings that capacity into the centre of the struggle. People need time, bodily strength, support and practicable alternatives to formulate purposes, refuse demands and act together. Power depletes these supports and assigns people responsibility for choices it constrains. I challenge its authority to make survival depend upon that surrender. **Those who sustain common life must share authority over its purposes.**

Our bodies, identities, relationships and needs differ. Equal worth grounds every person's claim to a constitutive voice. Support must strengthen a person's voice; it grants nobody the right to take over their purposes. No one may ground self-realisation in the consumption of another person's life.

The same responsibility follows those who develop, own and deploy technology. Calling harm the natural course of technological evolution cannot release them from accountability for their decisions. **No one may impose the consequences of their decisions upon others as fate.**

I refuse to let power consume the human as fuel while denying people authority over the purposes that their lives sustain. Food must nourish; water must remain within reach; education and care must answer to the lives they sustain. No balance sheet can cancel that obligation. People must have a voice in where, with whom and under which conditions they live. We constitute the world we inhabit; we must share authority over the life we make possible. **Survival is not living.**

Power's use of human life grants it no right to determine, on its own, the purposes of that life.

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