

# Somatechnics

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Edited by

Elizabeth Stephens and Malena Gustavson

Special Issue: Geocorpographies of  
Commemoration, Repression and Resistance

Guest Editors: Mahdis Azarmandi, Elaine  
Laforteza and Maud Ceuterick

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## GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

# Geocorpographies of Commemoration, Repression and Resistance

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Mahdis Azarmandi, Elaine Laforteza and  
Maud Ceuterick

The contributions in this special issue expose the connections between somatechnics and geocorpographies: the ongoing permutations of geopolitical and geographical influences on conceptions of personhood and bodies, whether on the level of the individual, the community, the nation-state and/or the transnational. This issue aims to link the geocorpographies of violence and resistance to the somatechnics processes through which bodies become calibrated as social subjects.

In his essay 'Geocorpographies of Torture', Joseph Pugliese coined the term *geocorpographies* to express 'that the body, in any of its manifestations, is always geopolitically situated and graphically inscribed by signs, discourses, regimes of visibility and so on. Its geopolitical markings can only be abstracted to the process of symbolic and political violence' (2007: 12). Through his rigorous approach in examining the intimate borders of the body within racialised zones of war and terror, Pugliese demonstrates that within particular spaces 'bodies become coextensive with space as such: they are the ground upon which military operations of occupation are performed through which control of the colonized country is secured' (2007: 12). Drawing on examples of the acts of torture by American soldiers inflicted upon inmates of the Abu Ghraib prison complex in Iraq, Pugliese stages a critical examination of how 'conquered Arab men' (2007: 5) become coextensive with the spaces of the prison complex, as well as the

broader spaces etched out by the 'war on terror'. Here, Pugliese uses the example of a palimpsest to dissect the ways in which the layering effect of colonial history ensures that traces of former colonial violences continue to remain palpable in the present moment. This notion of the palimpsest girds how geocorpographies builds a network of power that dissolves the border between the colonial past and the supposed 'post-colonial' present.

As Sten Pultz Moslund states, coloniality 'involves a biopolitical transformation of the human body into an object of subjugation, control' (2015: 27). Once the hierarchisation of human bodies is established, problematic and unproblematic bodies can be identified and classified into different categories: either as intrusive bodies that need to be disciplined and controlled, or as bodies that assimilate to dominant social orders, and therefore can be validated as 'safe' citizens of particular nation-states. The former not only face restrictions upon entering national territory, but are not permitted to occupying any space in the production of and management of how a nation remembers and celebrates its history, enacts its laws and protects its citizens.

The papers in this special issue track the tensions that derive from the hierarchisation and categorisation of human bodies through a variety of contexts. In part, this was a main concern of the 8<sup>th</sup> *Annual Somatechnics Conference Space, Race, Bodies: Geocorpographies of City, Nation and Empire* held at the University of Otago, New Zealand on 8–10 December, 2014. The conference brought together scholars such as Joseph Pugliese, Susan Stryker, Jacinta Ruru, Jasbir Puar and Rebecca Stringer in order to share and discuss ideas about space, race and bodies under the rubric of *somatechnics*, linking embodiment and technology as per Nikki Sullivan and Samantha Murray's use of the term (2009). Such an approach does not view the body simply as a vehicle that *can* be altered by the values and discourses of its surrounding culture or potentially modified by biotechnology. Rather, the body is always-already marked by culture and the historical and political processes through which one comes to embody sets of knowledge about gender, sexuality, race and ability that constrain or enable the body's actions in certain ways.

The papers in this special issue of *Somatechnics* are derived from this conference. Drawing on Pugliese's notion of geocorpographies, the conference hosted a range of theoretical, political and cultural perspectives that derived inspiration from Pugliese's work. In the same vein, this special issue recalls on Pugliese's investment in exposing the underbelly to conspicuous acts of benevolence, protection and

peace-keeping, in order to locate the technologies of media, governance, culture and law within the geocorographies of space, memory, religion and race. Taking as their case study such diverse material as literary works, post-colonial critiques, governmental agendas, commemoration sites, Indigenous sovereignty or drone technologies, the papers of this issue address the localised production of various spaces, such as the nation-state, the space of public discourse, and transnational relations of power. In doing so, each paper highlights the racialised and nationalist practices ascribed to bodies.

Thor Kerr and Shaphan Cox's paper, for example, examines the Western Australian context and the production of Aboriginal 'protection'. By analysing the production of localised spaces within Western Australia, as envisioned and instantiated by governmental and media imperatives, Kerr and Cox focus on the capillaries of racialised power that circumscribe Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal bodies. In this manner, Kerr and Cox track the hierarchisation of bodies founded on denuding Indigenous sovereignty. Verita Sriratana and Mahdis Azarmandi also look at how the hierarchisation of bodies forms understandings and experiences of and in the nation-state. They do this by focusing on how the processes of memorialisation of war and violence engender the dissection and re-assemblage of certain bodies, to the point that they can be overlooked, silenced and/or erased. Caitlin Overington and Thao Phan explore the strategy of the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM) to bring visibility to the invisible 'guest workers' population of the city, without recognising them as full citizen. Rather than institutional or governmental reforms, the SKM initiative opted for a highly visible Coke campaign advertising the presence of migrant workers, yet maintaining them voiceless and outside the everyday urban space. Elaine Laforteza's paper in this issue examines how two different nation-states (the Philippines and Australia) connect through their shared investment in maintaining a 'secular' mode of governmentality within their borders as well as through their cultivation of bilateral relationships. Here, Laforteza examines how the maintenance of national spaces are imbricated through relationships with other nation-states. With this, Laforteza names the racialised and geopolitical measures through which secular governmentality operates in the name of bilateral interests focused on peace-keeping in the post-9/11 context. Khalid Alhathlool's paper, focus on the conception of hybridised identities in post-colonial scholarship, thus exploring the identity politics that emerge through reinscriptions of dominant modes of being and becoming.

These various productions of racialised spaces are informed by different colonising, imperial and political operations. However, simultaneously, there are also racialised, ideological and socio-cultural commonalities that form a web of transnational geocorpographies. By attending to the local specificities of racialised and ethnic identities, as well as theoretical concerns, in connection with their broader geopolitical ramifications, this special issue seeks to draw attention to the ongoing mutations, contestations and reaffirmations of space, race and bodies.

Verita Sriratana's paper, 'From "God Builders" to "Devil Workers": The Somatechnics of Embalming and the Geocorpographies of Central and Eastern Europe's Holocaust Tourism in Jáchym Topol's *The Devil's Workshop*' introduces the term 'hypercorposurreality' as an interrogative tool for examining Jáchym Topol's *The Devil's Workshop* (2013). Sriratana specifies that 'hypercorposurreality' refers to the 'body which transcends the body, the sign of which signified transcends its authentic signification and evokes in readers what Merleau-Ponty calls "hyper-reflection", the kind of reflection which criticises the kind of reflection which overlooks the limitations of idealisation'. With this, Sriratana contributes to the literature around the crisis of identity and memory in post-WWII Eastern & Central Europe, and demonstrates how this memory and identity is geographically located. Her rigorous and elegiac analysis of Topol's novel signals the horrors of WWII and how this impacted on the constitution of space, place and bodies within Eastern Europe. She also draws out Topol's writing on the haunting memories of war, as well as the commodification of war and death for touristic and capitalist purposes.

Also with a focus on literary textual analysis, Khalid Alhathlool's paper, 'Hybridity: A Privilege of a few or the Necessity for All in Amin Maalouf's *In the Name of Identity*' stages an in-depth analysis of Maalouf's book, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* (2008). Alhathlool situates his exploration hybridised identities in the context of other post-colonial scholarship, such as that of Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Ulf Hannerz on hybridity. With this, Alhathlool exposes the tensions between conceptualisations and critiques of identity premised on notions of 'purity' and pre-fixed notions of 'migrancy'. Here, Alhathlool provides a critique of *In the Name of Identity* whilst assessing diverse perspectives on post-colonial identity. In particular, Alhathlool interrogates claims of neutrality in *In the Name of Identity*. This is a key strategy for highlighting the ways in which identities are calibrated as 'universal, and therefore denuded

from any particular political, religious and cultural allegiance. However, this supposed absence of allegiance speaks of a connection to a particularised social order. Alhathlool states: 'Again, the assumption on which this notion relies is that the public sphere is intrinsically secular and neutral. What follows is the need to 'neutralise' individuals; to create individuals who are void of any allegiance to a particular culture [...]'

Elaine Laforteza's paper, 'Separation of Church from State? Secular Somatechnologies of Governmentality and Pedagogy' names what is invisibilised in creating spaces of 'neutrality', that is, the power of secular governmentality to act in accordance to Christianity, so much so that secularism becomes imbued with the ethos of Christianity. Drawing on Gil Anidjar's work on secularism, Laforteza argues for the reconsideration of secular governmentality as divorced from Christian agendas. Laforteza draws on the Philippines-Australia nexus, namely in the production of bilateral and pedagogical techniques, as a means through which secularism becomes operational as Christianity in the post 9/11 context. In focus are two 'developmental' programs: (1) the Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao project, which Australia and the Philippines have established as a pedagogical tool for including Muslim-Filipinos within 'secular' society and (2) Gawad Kalinga, a not-for-profit organisation that strives to create solidarity between Christian and Muslim Filipinos. Laforteza uses the term 'secular somatechnologies' to investigate how somatechnologies of the state collude to create secular frameworks that shape bilateral and national identities. In addition she highlights the Castilian Spanish colonial context as the means through which secular somatechnologies operate through Christianity.

Mahdis Azarmandi also considers the context of Spanish colonialism and the ways it forms particular ideas of a nation-state. In 'Commemorating No-Bodies: Christopher Columbus and the Violence of Social-Forgetting', Azarmandi focuses on white ignorance and memorialisation in Spain. She questions and problematises the imagination of the Spanish national body as an inherently white body and how the commemoration of conquest as discovery renders invisible the indigenous and bodies of color that were exploited, tortured and killed as part of the Spanish colonial expansion. Turning her attention to the Columbus monument in Barcelona in particular, Azarmandi reframes the public narratives of discovery, adventure and voyage that accompany the memorialisation of the Spanish colonial past as master narrative of colonialism, a narrative that actively silences

counter narratives. Azarmandi draws links here with the racism described by Fanon, and on which Pugliese bases his notion of geocorpopographies, as a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority that is organised along this very line of the human and non-human. This is a line that has politically, economically and culturally produced what Peruvian sociologist Quijano describes as the coloniality of power that has remained in place long after formal colonialism has ended. According to Azarmandi, this is an ongoing coloniality that hides the violence that enables colonial celebrations. Consequently, she argues, colonial monuments are one manifestation of the on-going coloniality and violence against racialised *damné* (Fanon 1963) and must be represented as memorials ‘to war and genocide’.

In ‘Happiness from the Skies or a New Death from above? #cokedrones in the City’, Overington and Phan point out that the basis of interaction enabled through the use of drone technologies is never simply between drones and humans. Instead, interactions between drones and humans appear as a complex web integrating the technologies themselves, those who control them, and persons who are already deemed subhuman. Through the use of drone technologies, the hierarchisation of human bodies occurs, not only in its traditional military usage but also and more tacitly in their renewal as commercial and civilian material. Overington and Phan perform a critical examination of the burgeoning use of drone technologies within Singaporean city environments through the #CokeDrone advertisement. The drone itself appears in a ‘friendlier’ body asking for redemption from its military weaponry counterparts, allowing them to be presented as detached from their military origin and negating thus their relation to violence. By reshaping its military body, negating their relation to violence, and portraying them as eyes that ‘see’ rather than ‘watch’, drones are resignified as ‘innocent’ and ‘banal’ objects of the everyday. Stressing their capability of producing content *from above*, the authors focus on drones as vehicles of ideologies which processes and data are neither innocent nor banal but, on the contrary, render invisible the intense history of drone violence and its victims, and ‘desubjectify’ certain socio-spheres of the Singaporean population.

In dialogue with Azarmandi’s aligning of privileged zones of white spectatorship/sight with the invisibilisation of ‘non-white’ experiences of history, Thor Kerr and Shaphan Cox’s paper, ‘Media, Machines and Might: Reproducing Western Australia’s Violent State of Aboriginal Protection’, considers state violence against Aboriginal bodies as explored through the reports in the Western Australian media. In accord with Overington and Phan’s analysis of how drone

technologies re-imagine human bodies, Kerr and Cox address a different technology-media communications in order to investigate how media discourse and financial interest mutually-reinforce state violence against Indigenous communities. Further, they examine how such violence is tied to the perpetuation of settler colonialism in contemporary contexts. As in to Overington and Phan's paper, Kerr and Cox emphasise the inextricable link between *sôma* and *techné*, wherein 'hard' technologies (such as drones and newspaper reports) are enmeshed with 'soft' technologies (such as norms and values) to cultivate different ways of bodily being and becoming. Kerr and Cox' paper also makes visible the link between media outlets, which are part of a conglomerate that makes most of its profit from extraction machines, and the reproduction of public discourse of 'Aboriginal protection'. By highlighting the links between media, machines and might, the article reveals how private capital accumulation functions 'within the reproduction of state violence against sovereign Aboriginal people'. Disguised as protective measures, the extraction of Aboriginal lands and exploitation, as well as the criminalisation of Aboriginal activists continues within the Australian settler colonial logic.

In these various contexts, this merging of the corporeal body with geographical space is deemed a necessary critical intervention – on institutional, cultural and legal levels – to influence the transnational movement of people, capital and technology. Recent debates over government surveillance and security, the partial recognition of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in (post)colonial states, and the ongoing plight of refugees illuminate the fractures and connections between identity and the geographical placement of bodies across cities, nations and the globe.

The papers in this issue traverse the complexities of ongoing local, national and transnational (dis)connections. They represent a timely contribution to the growing body of scholarship on somatechnics, given that each paper proposes nuanced understandings of the corpographies of state-sanctioned violence, ongoing resistance, literary critique and representation, and/or reconceptualisations of how bodies become calibrated as certain social subjects.

This special issue further contributes to scholarship that explore how various technologies of power emerge through formations of personhood. Khalid Alhathloul's paper, for instance, maps out post-colonial scholarship onto experiences and negotiations of hybridity and identity. Overington and Phan, in particular, stresses that the integration of drones in the city transforms practices

of the everyday space by bringing new technologies of control and surveillance from above. Other scholars, such as Azarmandi and Laforteza, trace the cultivation of colonial empires, such as the one staged by Castilian Spaniards: Azarmandi investigates the memorialisation of the Spanish nation-state as informed by dominant colonial history, Laforteza names the 400 years of Spanish colonial governance as the template through which the Philippines-Australia nexus and its focus on 'secular' governmentality becomes normalised.

With each paper, the supposed borders between the colonial 'past' and the contemporary present are fused through ongoing geocorpographies of commemoration, repression and resistance. The contributions gesture towards the Spivakian concerns: in whose interest is this for? For whose body? For whose nation-state? For what purpose? This special issue seeks to explore these questions, and in doing so, expose the limits to justice that inscribe the mechanisms and somatechnics of governmentality, power and solidarity.

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