CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The somatechnics of violence: (Im)material, affective, and digital transformations. Editorial: Part two
Authors	Geerts, Evelien;Gray, Chantelle;Carstens, Delphi
Publication date	2024-08-01
Original Citation	Geerts, E., Gray, C. and Carstens, D. (2024) 'The somatechnics of violence: (Im)material, affective, and digital transformations. Editorial: Part two', Somatechnics, 14:2, pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.3366/soma.2024.0428
Rights	© 2024, Edinburgh University Press. This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Edinburgh University Press in Somatechnics. The Version of Record is available online at: https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428
Download date	2026-11-15 13:49:44
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/16195

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

The Somatechnics of Violence: (Im)material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two.

Evelien Geerts, Chantelle Gray, and Delphi Carstens

Violence takes many forms, as the editors and authors in this double special issue on the somatechnics of violence also argue.[1] Forming the second instalment of a project that wishes to rethink and update philosophical and critical theoretical conceptualisations of violence, this particular issue starts with some topological and cartographical reflections on violence.

Raw and corporeal, systemic and subtle, the violences described here shift 'from the visible to the invisible, from the frontal to the viral, from brute force to mediated force, from the real to the virtual, from the physical to the psychological, from the negative to the positive, withdrawing into the subcutaneous, subcommunicative, capillary and neuronal space' of the psyche, as Byung-Chul Han also puts it in *Topology of Violence* ([2011]2018: 1). Capitalist 'achievement' society or, perhaps more accurately, burn-out society, has, after all, fine-tuned the neoliberal art of individual self-management and self-exploitation. This does not, however, mean that racialised extractivism-based capitalist relations of production have been completely restructured, nor that violence has been completely internalised (see Chakravartty and da Silva 2012). While modernity might have partly delegitimised the socio-political expressions of bloody violence by forcing it into viral, immaterial, and invisible cyber and psychological 'non-places' and liminal spaces, this has – as has been argued throughout this double special issue – merely multiplied the forms that violence may take and propagate. Besides, the spectacle of public and mediated violence has not disappeared from view, as ongoing violent conflicts around the world demonstrate. Neither have modern nation states curtailed the violent forms

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

of exploitation and expulsion that accompanied the 18th and 19th-century phases of laissez-faire capitalism. Rather, these violent forms have been ramped up to an alarming level of planetary violence that now threatens the integrity of all living processes. It is therefore not altogether correct to dismiss, as Han ([2011]2018) does, René Girard's ([1961]1965) theory of mimetic rivalry as an underlying factor in economies of violence. Processes of violent expulsion and the baleful logics of the plantation remain caught up in imitations of the western project of modernity, now proliferated by new technologies that spread as deadly spirals of vengeful violence and accelerated by the attention economies and post-truth scenarios of neoliberalism (see Carstens 2018; Giroux 2022). Violence remains circulating as an all-pervasive affective economy of mimetic rivalry and fear, both internalised and externalised, taking on multiplying literal and symbolic forms directed via a variety of bourgeoning technical and algorithmic apparatuses. Today, we need to remain especially vigilant to violence's mushrooming forms, particularly as they intersect with and penetrate not only bodies – whether human, (made) non-human, or more-than-human – but also the increasingly threadbare and overexploited ecosystems and planetary processes upon whose health and continued thriving our own survival depends.

We can speak of different cartographies and topologies that follow the histories and modalities of power and sovereignty at specific temporal intersections, as well as practices of inclusion, exclusion, exception, and compromise through which violence moves. In a broad sense, these pursuits are inherently mechanistic, implying the construction of meridians and parallels, the plotting of locations and paths, the quantification of things and forces – attempts to organise violence via reductions, scales, correspondences, and the all-too-human logics of exceptionalism. These are decidedly non-innocent pursuits; practices of seeing and measuring that are invariably caught up with what Donna J. Haraway (1988) refers to as the god tricks of

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. “The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two.” Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

western transcendental thought and aesthetics which, in turn, are directly implicated in planet-destroying colonial logics of control, capture, and extraction. In an age of ubiquitous computation, we need to be even more on the alert as algorithmic governance appears to have scaled the mechanistic and mimetic fetishes of modernity and its increasingly violent visualising practices. Yet, while visualising practices have traditionally been grounded in fixity and placement, with often violent and detrimental effects on the territories, resources and populations being mapped and measured, more critically nuanced counter-actualising approaches to such disciplines disengage from the violence of mechanistic and transcendent reason by paying attention to matters of ‘relationality, redistribution, layering and virtuality’ (Debrix 2015: 444). Aware of a long history of both epistemological and worldly violence, ecofeminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial practices require researchers to situate themselves both materially and immaterially vis-à-vis their mapping practices and to thereby take critical notice of the ethico-political implications of their practices.

So cautioned, we might now approach violence, as the contributors in this special issue have attempted to do, in all its protean multiplexity by accountably relating to somatechnical assemblages and attending more closely to matters of more-than-human care, as well as micro-scales of politics and gestures, and the potential of aesthetic and conceptual slippages and breaks that open new avenues for queering western modernity’s violent ontological, epistemological, and ethico-political assumptions. In other words, in practices like critical geography, topology, and cartography, there have been ‘a conceptual re-evaluation of what space is, means, and does’ and ‘a move away from an insistence on topographical priority’ toward ‘new ways of understanding relations’ in space between visualising practices and bodies, both human and not (Debrix 2015: 444). New forms of critical topology and cartography are thus less focused on arbitrary ascriptions and problematic representational

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

logics than they are on the somatechnical 'violence of representation' and the relations of vulnerability and precariousness that emerge between bodies, objects, and processes and the bio- and necropolitical assemblages they form part of. Cartographical explorations, as we understand and use them in this special issue, are focused in particular on what remains 'unrecognized even when it appears to emerge in full light' (Debrix 2015: 451). More critical and situated posthuman cartographies and topologies, as Elizabeth Povinelli (2011: 109) would have it, draw our attention to 'differentially distributed zones of vulnerability and abandonment as places in which, at least potentially, a new ethics of life and sociability could emerge.'

With these threads in mind, Nina Lykke considers, in the opening article of this special issue, the ways in which the worldwide cancer epidemic is shaped through a complex of somatechnical intra-actions while simultaneously being undergirded by epistemologies of ignorance. Drawing on autobiographical material, she positions cancer as the intimately fleshy suffering of individual bodies in its entanglements with various structural violences that are exerted through, for example, carcinogenic necrotechnologies like plastics and pesticides. She pays careful attention to the ways in which the increasingly harmful effects of these necrotechnologies are obscured through universalising constructions of cancer as a naturally emerging pathology. These stories of cancer, she argues, are bolstered by the larger epistemological configurations of ignorance they form part of and the double terror-inducing images of cancer emerging from these. That is, cancer as a natural but pathological enemy or doppelgänger-terrorist that must be combatted by science at all costs, and sick cancerous bodies as the battlefields of the forces of 'good' and 'evil,' both of which obscure the histories of human-instigated environmental toxification. These images and metaphors are, moreover, reflective of the pervasiveness of western imaginaries of war which have, in the twenty-first century, morphed from Cold War symbolisms into the "war against cancer-as-terror(ist)"

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

images. With reference to Spinoza's concept of *conatus*, which refers to the endeavour of all matter to persevere, Lykke radically transforms our understanding of cancer by sharing her personal awakening to the idea that a Spinozist immanent and monist philosophical framing addresses not only the *conative* dynamics and *potentia* of the healthy parts of a cancer patient's body, but also that of the progressing cancer which is itself a powerful conative and vital material agency. Recast this way, Lykke herself comes to a new understanding of the detrimental effects of epistemologies of ignorance that cast both cancer and the cancerous body in terms of war and *the war on.* Against these images and practices of war – or a kind of war – she holds that cancerous embodiment is not a state of pathological exception, but a vital and conative process, just as bodily resistance to it is. In other words, living and dying, like becoming and decomposing, are not in opposition to each other, but are continuously and queerly entangled, and realising this makes way for deeper explorations of the necropolitical operations of power at play in the current cancer epidemic.

This is followed by Evelien Geerts and Delphi Carstens's cartographical reflections on the violent somatechnics of mimetic resentment which, they argue, is traditionally conceptualised in relation to *ressentiment* but is seldom analysed as a somatechnical phenomenon that meshes the corporeal and the technological. They therefore set out to refashion our understandings of mimetic resentment by cartographically attending to its pre-personal affective attractor spaces and the affective micropolitics – which includes violence-engendering micropolitics – these give rise to, as well as the social and environmental macropolitical assemblages these form part of. Their aim is not, however, only to resituate *ressentiment*, but to use this mapping as a springboard from which to address the escalating environmental crises currently unfolding all around us and, as Lykke would state it, the entangled epistemologies of ignorance that produce and sustain conceptual, material and

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

affective gaps between the human, the non-human, and the more-than-human worlds we inhabit. A remapping of mimetic resentment, as they argue, also requires a reconfiguration of our conception of, for example, the notion of *crisis* and what has recently been called *permacrisis* – which is to say a crisis pushing us towards a future that may never come into being – as well as its inevitable corollaries of resilience and linearity. Following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Geerts and Carstens argue that every form of politics has both macro and micro levels, and that both need to be accounted for. Accounting for mimetic resentment cartographically thus requires a situated understanding of the permacrisis it is currently propelled by. Their message is clear: humans are not just autonomous beings driven by compulsive mimetic impulses, but elements of larger cosmic assemblages, all plagued and connected by existential perishability.

The third article, by Sama Khosravi Ooryad, picks up on the memetic thread left to us by Geerts and Carstens, but focuses on the eerie effects and affects of violence emerging from and being disseminated by the somatechnical entanglement of bodies and technologies. The site of her argument is the murders of Iranian women – but particularly that of Ghazaleh Chalavi in September 2022 – and the months-long feminist revolts it sparked in Iran and its diaspora. What made the murder of Chalavi unique is that it was captured on her mobile phone *by her.* With reference to Jacques Derrida, Khosravi Ooryad argues that Chalavi's deathly absence from the present moment of her death, as well as her ghostly reappearances online, can be understood as temporal and hauntological disturbances. That is, they disrupt the seemingly linear timeframe of her murder, instead inducing a memetic rhythmicality that is further aided by the ongoing affective circulation and variation of the online videos. The author argues, moreover, that the rhythmic and memetic movements of the murdered body and its return to life through the shared online videos are indicative of the *somatic* elements of the clips. Echoing

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

Lykke's understanding of the continuity between life and death, Khosravi Ooryad holds that the captured killings of the Iranian women, besides bringing to light the systemic political violence imposed on the bodies of women and marginalised people in Iran, also ignited memetic rhythms of resistance that might point to potential lines of flight and a justice-to-come.

This focus on the macro and micro lines of violence aimed at bodies in and through the technoscapes they form part of is further elaborated by Alina Achenbach. Redirecting the reader's attention to migrant bodies, she contends that although bio-/necropolitical accounts of the border can account for the ways in which bodies are penetrated and transformed by the border and vice versa, the subversive and risky activity of people on the move, who themselves insist on the border by outsmarting and transgressing it, is largely ignored. To address these lacunae, Achenbach (re-)formulates the idea of a "border-as-assemblage" by offering a somatechnical reading of border transgression. Accordingly, migrant bodies and the assemblages they form part of are shown to simultaneously challenge and reproduce the border across different technoscapes. Achenbach argues that it is precisely this entangled somatechnical bio-/necropolitical nexus – where the very same border constitutes a death-world to some and a lifeworld to others – that calls attention to the body as site of bordering. This *becoming-border*, whereby bodies come to *carry the border*, finds expression particularly in the forensic examination scene – the very scene where people on the move must prove why they are deserving of being transformed from migrant to refugee rather than, say, terrorist, by exposing their bodies to a medicalising-moralising gaze. In conclusion, the author mobilises the body as a potential site of struggle against this physically and epistemically violent objectification and, in so doing, offers new perspectives on border resistance.

The final article in this special issue redirects our attention back to the environmental violences first articulated by Lykke, and Geerts and Carstens. Theoretically grounded in the

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

interdisciplinary fields of Queer Death Studies and Feminist Posthumanities, Marietta Radomska points to the ongoing violence that ensues from framing the mourning of nonhuman death and ecological loss as less important than human death – or, as the case very often is, not important at all. Her argument, instead, is that environmental violence should be recast as structural and systemic – in the same way that racial or gendered violences can be – and as entangled with direct and indirect violence against more marginalised and deprivileged human communities, such as Indigenous peoples in different parts of the world. Focusing in this article on *ecocide*, Radomska reframes environmental violences within a somatechnical framework to expose the multiple and pliable mechanisms and techniques used for permeating, maiming, exhausting, or ultimately annihilating the flesh of plants, animals, microorganisms, and their milieus. Having provided a sound theoretical exposition of ecocidal violence, she argues that it practically forms part of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has continued to unfold since February 2022. The point, for Radomska, is that the direct military actions of the Russian army, as well as its indirect consequences, are violently erasing people, cultures and cultural mixes, the nonhuman world, and Ukraine and its surrounding landscapes. But these violences, both slow and fast, long-term and sudden, also have another side: deep despair and anger at the multiple losses that have resulted from this senseless conflict. Bringing to light various scholarly and artistic responses to these violences, Radomska shows that it is not only the human who is mourned in these artistic expressions, but the nonhuman and more-than-human too. These creative impressions have, moreover, the capacity to activate care through witnessing and, in so doing, trigger imaginings that call forth a future beyond the human individual.

In closing, it is our sincere hope that the articles in this double issue provoke new problems – *true problems*, as Deleuze ([1966]1991) might say, rather than *false problems*

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

formulated according to reigning imaginaries and frameworks which, in advance, pre-empt the kinds of solutions that are can be thought and imagined. This is our 'ethical task properly so called: diagnosing the symptoms of society, formulating or posing problems at the level of practice, and fabulating more therapeutic ways of living that renew and conserve our being, that renew and conserve the world' (Gray 2022: 9). As the editors and authors of this double special issue affirm; what we need to urgently continue cultivating are radical acts of critical, grounded hope (Geerts 2022) and imagination that continuously reach toward new ways of being and doing, resisting violence in all its forms by remaining fully present with the trouble. The only antidote left to us is to cultivate a 'philosophy of presence' (Grosz 2017: 136) that acknowledges a radical immanence with the world's multiple others (both human and not).

Acknowledgements

This double special *Somatechnics* issue (of which this is the second issue) was born out of the international "(Im)materialities of Violence" conference that took place at the University of Birmingham in 2021, organised by Dr. Katharina Karcher and Dr. Evelien Geerts and funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 851329 – UrbTerr). For more information about "Urban Terrorism in Europe (2004-19): Remembering, Imagining, and Anticipating Violence," see the project's official website at https://blog.bham.ac.uk/urbterr/.

Notes

1. Also see Geerts, Gray, and Carstens 2024 for the first part of this double special issue.

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. "The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two." Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

References

Carstens, Delphi (2018), 'Cultivating a Dark Haecceity: A Pedagogy of the Uncanny and Dark Transports,' *Parallax*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 344–355. 10.1080/13534645.2018.1496583.

Chakravartty, Paula and Denise F. da Silva (2012), 'Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction,' *American Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 3, pp. 361–385. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23273527.

Debrix, François (2015), 'Topologies of Vulnerability and the Proliferation of Camp Life,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 444–459. 10.1068/d13089p.

Deleuze, Gilles ([1966]1991), *Bergsonism*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, New York: Zone Books.

Geerts, Evelien (2022), 'Navigating (Post-)Anthropocenic Times of Crisis: A Critical Cartography of Hope,' *CounterText*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 385–412. 10.3366/count.2022.0281.

Geerts, Evelien, Chantelle Gray, and Delphi Carstens (eds) (2024), 'The Somatechnics of Violence: (Im)material, Affective, and Digital Transformations,' *Somatechnics*, vol. 14, no. 1. https://www.euppublishing.com/toc/soma/14/1.

Girard, René ([1961]1965), *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Giroux, Henry A. (2022), *Pedagogy of Resistance: Against Manufactured Ignorance*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gray, Chantelle (2022), *Anarchism After Deleuze and Guattari: Fabulating Futures*, London: Bloomsbury Press.

Grosz, Elizabeth (2017), *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics and the Limits of Materialism*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Geerts, E., C. Gray, and D. Carstens. 2024. “The Somatechnics of Violence:(Im) material, Affective, and Digital Transformations. Editorial: Part Two.” Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power 14 (2): pp. 107-114. https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2024.0428

Han, Byung-Chul ([2011]2018), *Topology of Violence*, trans. by Amanda DeMarco. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Haraway, Donna J. (1988), ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 575–599. 10.2307/3178066.

Povinelli, Elizabeth (2011), *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*, Durham: Duke University Press.