The Somatechnics of Violence

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

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A growing number of philosophical and critical theoretical studies are arguing for new frameworks from which to theorise and grapple with contemporary forms of violence that escape the overdetermined representations thereof that ensued in the decade or so following 9/11 – which Jeffrey Di Leo and Uppinder Mehan aptly called critical 'theory's "ground zero"' (2012: 16). While it is true that these attacks transformed current-day perceptions and theorisations of violence, the ensuing so-called Wars on Terror led to reductionist treatments thereof, thereby eliding the incredibly complex, multi-layered, and lived phenomenon that violence is. A lived, often bodily-felt, and traumatising phenomenon that, consequently, cannot be captured in universal frameworks but must, instead, be situated in its material, immaterial, extramaterial or affective, and – more so than even before, as this double special issue also argues – digital contexts.

Such situated philosophical analyses of violence require a different vocabulary and world-reimagining methodologies: it is, we hold, no longer sufficient to merely address the impact that violence currently has through, for example, the Foucauldian ([1977]1980) idea of the apparatus – a contextual arrangement of discursive-material phenomena diagramming and thus maintaining societal power relations, while shaping subjects. Neither does the Harawayan (1988: 591) 'apparatus of bodily production', which pays more attention to the intersecting lived categories of gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and so on, suffice as an analytical instrument. Although both Michel Foucault and Donna J. Haraway accurately theorise the differential mattering of embodied subjects and the violence inflicted during processes of (non-

)mattering, today's societies, together with the myriad of ways in which violence manifests itself, are rapidly changing, requiring us to rethink 'the relation between knowledge and ethics in societies that are governed by algorithmic digital systems' (Colman et al. 2018: 8). Critical theoretical works from the past, such as Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' ([1955]1978), Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961]1967), and Hannah Arendt's *On Violence* (1969) are of course not rendered obsolete when analysing violence today – the multitude of currently ongoing wars and violent conflicts, often stemming from imperialist neocolonialism or genocidal settler colonialism in combination with late extractive capitalism's insatiable hunger for mining the planet until depletion, demonstrates that we still have much to learn from Benjamin, Fanon, Arendt, and others (also see Lawrence and Karim 2007 for a detailed overview of other major works on 20th and 21st-century violence).

Driven by a mix of neoliberal governmentality, late extractive capitalism, and urban landscapes-shaping counterterrorist securitisation measures, present-day societies of hyper-control are plagued by violent threats from multiple, often crisscrossing directions engendered by interlinked macrostructures and microevents that combine the (im)material, affective, and digital. We may think here, for example, of the violent – yet insufficiently emphasised – damage inflicted by white supremacy, institutionalised racism, and racist microaggressions; the mob-inciting divisive rhetoric of the "new" fascisms (see Lawtoo 2019) pushing for alt-facts and alt-realities that can only be countered by critical pedagogies of resistance (see Giroux 2022); the increase in affective disorders, driven by what Mark Fisher (2009) calls capitalist realism; (im)material infowars engendering algorithmic violence, fittingly described by Mimi Onuoha as 'violence that an algorithm or automated decision-making system inflicts by preventing people from meeting their basic needs' (2018: n. p.; also see Noble 2018; Bellanova et al. 2021); and the Anthropocenic ecocide unfolding itself and impacting transcorporeally entangled human and more-than-human worlds (see Alaimo 2016).

It would seem, then, that novel analytical perspectives are needed and this, as we would like to propose, can be found in what Joseph Pugliese and Susan Stryker (2009: 2-3), inspired by Foucault, have identified as a 'somatechnical assemblage'. Initiated by Nikki Sullivan (2005), but further developed by Pugliese and Stryker, and later on also by Sullivan and Samantha Murray (2011: v) and Line Henriksen and Marietta Radomska (2015), somatechnics stands for 'the materialisation of embodied being[s]' or how they come to matter through processes of meaning-making. Bringing together the corporeal and the technological – which, according to a somatechnical perspective, are always already enmeshed – a somatechnics-focused analytical framework zooms in on the (un)making and (de)humanisation of corporeal beings, all while creating space for a much-needed ethico-political critique (see, for instance, Butler 2020 and Vergès ([2020]2022) of the various types of violence these corporeal beings are forced to endure.

We encouraged our special issue contributors to think beyond so-called shifts (from the visible to the invisible, for instance, as accentuated in Byung-Chul Han's *Topology of Violence* ([2011]2018)) and similar epistemological paradigms that follow a logic of tracing – a way of thinking that fixes phenomena by means of neatly organised structures and representations (see Deleuze and Guattari [1980]2005 for this critique). The reason for this is that we, in somatechnical fashion, would like to emphasise the entangled nature of the corporeal, incorporeal, and the technological; the micro and the macro; the visible and the invisible; as well as of humans, the more-than-human, and the dehumanised – aspects brought into sharp focus by, for instance, critical new materialist, posthumanist, and Deleuzoguattarian philosophies (see e.g., Chen 2012; Braidotti 2013; Shotwell 2016). Or as Elizabeth Grosz has put it: When analysing violence, 'the incorporeal conditions of corporeality, the excesses beyond and within corporeality that frame, orient and direct material things and processes' need to be examined in relation to corporeality and material (infra)structures (Grosz 2017; Grosz in

Grosz and Bell 2017: 5).

Given these conditions, overlaps, and excesses, how can we withstand the myriad structural and experiential violences inflicted upon us and by us? To address this question, this double special issue kicks off with an exploration of the somatechnical anti-fascist therapeutic-pedagogical model of *somaterapia* (somatherapy) which, as Aragorn Eloff explains, encapsulates the premise that bodies and minds are somatic wholes that both store and express violence in all its forms. Taking on an enactive view of embodied cognition, Eloff outlines somatherapy as 'an emergent-aleatoric somatechnical pedagogy of nested systemic-environmental enactive schemas'. Engaged with as a form of physical group therapy, participants in *somaterapia* are encouraged to express and thereby direct the difficult balance between self-distinction and self-production. In this way, as Eloff also argues, somatherapy offers a hands-on, affective, socially-mediated practical methodology whereby subjects are able to manage the 'mutually maladaptive micro-fascist loops that represent failed attempts at regulating the primordial tension of life' and the violences, both material and immaterial, structural and interpersonal, that accompany it.

That interpersonal and structural forms of violence are entangled with and replicated via 'unconscious bodily actions and reactions' is also the premise of our second contribution by Nidesh Lawtoo, which works with the notion that 'humans are not only driven by a rational logos' but by 'an irrational pathos generative of contagious pathologies' that works via mimesis. Analysing the 2020 police murder of Rayshard Brooks in the United States, Lawtoo explores the problematic of 'hypermimetic violence' by bringing mimesis into conversation with embodied systemic violence, the technics of racial representations, mediated fictions, and misrecognition. 'Mimesis', as Lawtoo convincingly states, plays a 'key mediation role' in the 'somatechnical transformation[s]' by which violence against minorities is normalised, enacted, and repeated.

Our third contributor, Katharina Karcher, explores a grassroots social justice 'dark sousveillance' campaign in the United Kingdom that seeks to challenge the unconscious racial biases and 'white innocence' of a jury. By 'publicly re-examining and re-narrating key CCTV evidence' presented during the trail of a 2021 mob-killing of a 14-year-old Black boy, this campaign presents a narrative of doubled violence; of a victim first violently attacked and killed by a racist mob, and then erased again by a racially prejudiced justice system. Karcher presents dark sousveillance as a counter-response to 'racist language and stereotypes, surveillance, and monitoring practices, hidden and open forms of physical violence, as well as laws and legal proceedings', in the process formulating an argument for the generation of 'critical hope for racial justice' as well as for a more inclusive society.

Writing together in our fourth contribution, Andrea Pavoni and Simone Tulumello, tackle the problematic of defining structural violence by investigating its somatechnical and tensional in-betweenness. Paying attention to the 'the tension-filled dynamics through which socio-material formations emerge, hold together or fall apart', Pavoni and Tulumello argue for an immanent relational approach to violence that weaves together its macro and micro, somatic and technical, material and affective components, as well as its (infra)structural and experiential aspects and expressions. The Deleuzoguattarian question of how to hold together heterogenous elements and actants in fluid, dynamic, and healthy somatechnical assemblages remains central to Pavoni and Tulumello's line of reasoning. Violence, they argue, should be 'understood as a diffuse, endogenous, excessive, and generative process' – something 'neither evident nor explicit', but instead operational 'as an incremental, accretive, and attritional force'.

Today, as Chantelle Gray explains in our fifth contribution, by drawing on Deleuzian theory, the boundaries of the subject are wavering between the individual and the dividual, or the '"hyperidividuated yet networked" data-person', whose soma/body is deeply and often

violently 'embedded in corporeal-technological transformations'. The social calculus of control society, with its networked algorithmic ecologies, entrench already existing advantages and sufferings. Gray argues that the contemporary dividual is embedded in 'somatechnical realities of extraction and surveillance' that are 'prefigured' by violent 'plantation logics'. By invoking François Laruelle's non-philosophy, Gray shows how we might 'defetishise' and refuse the '*violence of sufficiency*' inherent in the circular plantation logics of extraction and vulnerability, as well as the capitalist logic of addiction that govern the brutal processes of 'subjectivation and subjectification under surveillance capitalism' and thereby repudiate its violently recursive 'power relationships' and structures.

Acknowledgements

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