

biotypologies of terrorism

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— BEYOND THE BIO?

One of the key burdens in contemporary work on the body and new technologies is that the bio-materiality of the body is being inexorably superseded by technological innovations that render the limitations and constraints of the bio-body redundant.¹ For instance, in his discussion of ‘the effects of technological acceleration arising from digital processing and computer-mediated communications’, the cultural theorist Paul Gilroy argues that these effects ‘mean that the individual is even less constrained by the immediate forms of physical presence established by the body’.² In this essay, I challenge this claim by focusing on the virulent redeployment of the most reductive empirico-positivist conceptualisations of the body by such organisations as law enforcement authorities and military institutions. In the context of the so-called ‘war on terror’ and the increasing use of biometric technologies in order to secure ‘identity dominance’ in the fighting of this war, I examine the manner in which essentialised biotypologies are mobilised and reproduced within the discursive practices of such organisations in order, pre-emptively, to identify and capture targeted subjects.

Biotypologies, I argue, function to constitute targeted subjects in terms of biometric ‘signatures’ of essentialised corporeal features, behaviours and practices; these essentialised biometric ‘signatures’ are constrained precisely by ‘the immediate forms of physical presence established by the body’. Genealogically tied to such seemingly outdated disciplines as anthropometry, craniology, phrenology and criminal anthropology, the use of biotypologies by both military and law enforcement authorities reproduces a disciplinary biopolitical regime premised on normative conceptualisations of race, gender, (dis)ability and bodily behaviour.

Situated within the domain of policy documents and new technologies, I proceed to examine how these biotypologies of targeted subjects are instrumental in fomenting cultural panics concerning the Arab and/or Muslim and/or figure 'of Middle Eastern appearance'. I conclude by drawing on the work of Reza Aramesh, a contemporary British Iranian artist, in order to address what is at stake for targeted subjects who are compelled to embody these biotypologies in the lived reality of their everyday lives.

— A BIOTYPOLOGY OF TERRORISTS: TRAINING KEYS #581: SUICIDE (HOMICIDE) BOMBERS

In 2005, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) published a document, *Training Keys #581: Suicide (Homicide) Bombers: Part 1*, designed to assist law enforcement authorities in the capture of prospective suicide bombers.³ The IACP is an influential law enforcement organisation that has an international reach. Established in 1893, it claims on its website to have over 20,000 members in over eighty-nine countries. Its influence in shaping law enforcement policy is also documented on its website, where it claims to have spearheaded the adoption of 'breakthrough technologies and philosophies' that have revolutionised police practice. I map this background to the IACP in order to underscore its power and influence in shaping policies and practices in the domain of law enforcement.

Situated in this context, I want to begin to unpack the cultural stereotypes and racialised presuppositions that inform *TK #581*'s biotypological profile of suicide bombers. *TK #581* announces in its introduction that it is concerned with offering the reader 'profiles' of suicide bombers in order to enable law enforcement personnel to prevent attacks. In the first instance, suicide bombers are scripted as at once graphically anomalous in the context of normative culture and yet invisible. This paradoxical feature is what gives them their inordinate power: grossly aberrant in their antisocial values, yet they appear to pass through social spaces without detection. Indeed, this feature is what enables a suicide bomber to function:

as a precision weapon, taking the explosive device right to the target. This is a dimensional standoff attack in the sense that the terrorist is 'invisible' (stealth-masked) until the device is detonated, which helps overcome the Western advantage of standoff targeting and defense based on physical distance.⁴

As I will presently discuss in more detail, it is precisely the doubleness of suicide bombers that disturbs, generates anxiety and foments cultural panics: they are monstrously deviant yet 'invisible'.

The above-cited description is inscribed by an incipient Eurocentricism that delineates the presuppositions that define the 'dimensional standoff attack' of suicide bombers that helps them overcome 'Western advantage of standoff targeting'. All suicide bombers are immediately positioned in this document as at once non-Western and as only in opposition

to the West, thereby effacing such groups as the Tamil Tigers, for instance, who are not fighting the West but their own internal Sri Lankan enemy. In this context, the ideologically loaded language of duplicity and stealth works to construct the fabled Orientalist figure of cunning and deception: they ‘sneak in undetected and reach their desired target’.⁵ I evidence this Orientalist marking of the figure of the terrorist as the text that I have been citing is situated under the rubric of ‘suicide bomber advantages’. Under this rubric, the text begins with this first dot point: ‘*Superior dedication to the mission*. A suicide bomber considered a *shahid*—a martyr who engages in jihad (holy war) and will, upon completion of the mission, bring honor to his or her family and organization and enjoy the benefits of eternal paradise’.⁶ From the start, *TK #581* marks the figure of the suicide bomber as singularly Muslim. This Orientalist figure serves to colour and frame all the text that follows. The now charged terms ‘jihad’ and ‘shahid’ render Islam as coextensively terroristic and violent. Regardless of the fact that *TK #581* is purportedly addressed to an international audience of law enforcement personnel, the suicide bomber is homogenised to the singular and monolithic figure of the violent Muslim. Furthermore, within this predictable dichotomised frame of the (Christian) West versus the Muslim, in which the West is implicitly represented, in Edward Said’s terms, as ‘freedom-loving [and] democratic’ and Muslims as ‘evil, totalitarian, and terroristic’, it becomes impossible to broach the charged topic of Western state-sponsored terrorism.⁷ In *TK #581*, Western state-sponsored terrorism is relegated to that space-off that, in cinematic terms, cannot be represented. What is mapped through this Orientalist move is what Said sardonically terms the Disneyfication of the world. Within the parodic parameters of this Orientalist schema:

when Orientals struggle against colonial occupation, you must say (in order not to risk a Disneyism) that Orientals have never understood the meaning of self-government the way ‘we’ do. When some Orientals oppose racial discrimination while others practice it, you say ‘they’re all Orientals at bottom’ and class interest, political circumstances, economic factors are totally irrelevant ... you say that if Arab Palestinians oppose Israeli settlement and occupation of their lands, then that is merely ‘the return of Islam,’ or, as a renowned contemporary Orientalist defines it, Islamic opposition to non-Islamic peoples, a principle of Islam enshrined in the seventh century. History, politics, and economics do not matter. Islam is Islam, the Orient is the Orient, and please take all your ideas about a left and a right wing, revolutions, and change back to Disneyland.⁸

Written nearly thirty years ago, this passage has lost none of its salience. In *TK #582* everything pivots on the violent dichotomy that Said here identifies. This process of discursive Disneyism proceeds to inform virtually the entirety of *TK #581*. Under the rubric of ‘suicide bombers preincident indicators’, *TK #581* unfolds all the typological signs that will disclose

prospective suicide bombers. In order to disable the tactical advantage of 'stealth-masking', that enables suicide bombers to 'remain undetected by blending in with their surroundings', a series of clearly discernible biotypologies-as-indices are catalogued.⁹ Drawing on the legendary duplicity of the Oriental, the document labours to expose all the possible ruses that a Muslim terrorist will deploy. 'Pretending to have a broken-down car, by putting the hood up, is another, less suspicious way many bombers conduct surveillance.'¹⁰ I juxtapose this terrorist ruse with this account by a member of Sydney's Muslim community:

three guys from the GIYC [Global Islamic Youth Centre from Lakemba, Sydney] went on a hunting trip near Broken Hill (in far western NSW). They ran out of petrol near a small refinery and asked the guy there if they could have some. Within half an hour they were being held to the ground at gunpoint. Raids like this are extremely detrimental to the minds of fair-minded Muslims.¹¹

In its detailed mapping of the profile of a terrorist, *TK #581* supplies the reader with a series of bullet-point biotypologies organised under a number of sub-headings, including: 'Behaviour. Does the individual act oddly, appear fearful, or use mannerisms that do not fit in? Examples include repeatedly circling an area on foot or in a car, pacing back and forth in front of a venue, glancing left and right while walking slowly, fidgeting with something under his or her clothes, exhibiting an unwillingness to make eye contact, mumbling (prayer), or repeatedly checking a watch or cell phone'.¹² Odd, fearful and dissonant mannerisms beg the question as to what constitutes, conversely, the behavioural attributes of the presupposed normative subject. *TK #581* founds its profile of the terrorist, predictably, on its absolute opposite. The obverse of the terrorist is the masculinised, white, middle-class, Western subject: cool, rational, able in both body and mind, a citizen of the world, assimilated to the dictates and codes of normative behaviour. I do not invoke the seemingly formulaic 'white male middle-class' subject for purely rhetorical purposes. On the contrary, it is evident this hegemonic subject is precisely the figure against which the 'abnormal' behaviour mapped by *TK #581* is judged and evaluated. In the face of this presupposed normative subject, *TK #581* fails to account for non-whites, non-citizens, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented individuals, and racialised (subaltern) subjects who, in the face of traumatic experiences with police and figures of immigration and law enforcement, might display precisely any or all those mannerisms of fear, anxiety, restlessness and fidgeting when positioned in public spaces surveilled and controlled by law enforcement agents.¹³

That in *TK #581* the behaviour of 'mumbling (prayer)' is ethnicised to target Muslims is evidenced by the fact that in November 2006 'six Muslim imams were removed from a commercial flight in Minnesota after being accused of "suspicious activity" that they said amounted to no more than saying an evening prayer'.¹⁴ The racial profiling, along religio-

ethnic lines, that inscribes *TK #581* is also evident in this other clear indicator of the deviant behaviour of a prospective terrorist: 'a fanatically religious person visiting sex clubs'.¹⁵ The 'fanatically religious' person is here, tautologically, a Muslim. Against this tautological figure of the fanatically religious Muslim who gives away his terrorist proclivities by indulging in paid sex, I juxtapose the behaviour of the Christian fundamentalist, Ted Haggard, religious counsel to the White House and named by *Time* magazine as one of the twenty-five most influential Christian evangelicals in the United States, who, according to the male prostitute Michael Forest Jones, paid for sex over a three-year period.¹⁶ In the Disneyfied world of *TK #581*, Muslims are already in excess of themselves: their terrorist orientation unleashes itself in the sexualised place of the bordello-cum-harem, as well as in such civilian spaces as commercial airplanes, where their mumbling of prayers is automatically a prelude to a terrorist explosion.

Under the bullet-point 'Appearance', *TK #581* proceeds to profile the would-be suicide bomber in terms of a cluster of visible typologised attributes:

Is the clothing, grooming, gender, or age of an individual out of place within the context of the environment? Examples include someone wearing a heavy coat or a jacket in warm weather, overly bulky or loose-fitting clothing, protrusions under the clothing, or strange hair coloring (that is, badly dyed hair).¹⁷

I will merely remark in passing on the class bias that informs the identificatory differential between salon-dyed hair and dodgy home-based attempts. I have discussed in detail elsewhere, in the context of the London police shooting of the young Brazilian electrician, Jean Charles de Menezes, the manner in which racial profiling enables the hallucinogenic reconfiguration by the police of the attributes of the target subject: in the London police shooting, de Menezes morphed into a 'South Asian', and was invested with a padded jacket trailing wires, when in fact he wore a light jacket that had no protrusions.¹⁸

The catalogue of biotypologies articulated in *TK # 581*'s preincident indicators/profile of a suicide bombers is both exhaustive and detailed:

A fresh shave—a male with a fresh shave and lighter skin on his lower face may be a religious Muslim zealot who has just shaved his beard so as not to attract attention, and to blend in better with other people in the vicinity.¹⁹

In the face of this regime of preincident indicators, the suicide bomber is in a visible double bind: not to shave is already to place oneself under suspicion, as the beard will self-evidently signal 'Muslim suicide bomber'.²⁰ Yet to shave one's beard is at once to expose oneself as a Muslim suicide bomber attempting to pass as a Western civilian. The biotypology of 'lighter skin' on the lower face of the freshly shaved 'Muslim zealot' marks the charged chromatics

of a racialised epidermal schema. The two-toned epidermal indicator of the prospective suicide bomber can only be legible on the basis of the dark skin of the upper face that enables the lighter tone to signify. Here, the taxonomic power of whiteness is enabled by a nuanced raciological regime that is capable of assigning a subject's racial status on the basis of the *topical* distribution of whiteness or blackness along the entire surface of the target subject's body. In this case, the faux white that marks the lower face of the freshly shaved swarthy Muslim zealot is a clear topical indicator of a terrorist attempting to pass as non-Muslim, non-zealous, civilian subject.

It is not only visible biotypological cues that will give away prospective suicide bombers. *TK #581* identifies smell as also supplying a key preincident indicator: 'Smell. Is the individual wearing too much cologne or perfume, or does he or she smell of talcum powder or scented water (for ritual purification)?'²¹ The Orientalist extravagance of suicide bombers, through their florid use of perfume, disrupts the puritanical olfactory codes of Western middle-class culture. Wafting excess fragrance as they walk, they announce their terrorist intentions before the fact and despite themselves. Enveloped in an intemperate nebula of perfume, they wave an olfactory red flag to the attuned noses of law enforcement bloodhounds.

In the context of the biopolitical regime of normative behaviour articulated in *TK #581*, subjects suffering mental illness are, by definition, not only already suspect figures, they are automatically at risk of being executed by police because of their 'erratic' behaviour. I cite here the shooting by US air marshalls of Rigoberto Alpizar, a 44-year-old US citizen at Miami International Airport, on 8 December 2005. Alpizar, suffering from bi-polar disorder, 'started running crazily through the aisle, he was running like he was frantic, his arms flailing in the air'; his wife followed in urgent pursuit, screaming out that her husband 'was bi-polar and had not had his medication'.²² Alpizar was not in the aircraft when he was shot; he was killed on an air bridge. 'No bomb was found on Mr Alpizar whose wife had tried to explain he had a mental illness, one witness explained.'²³ Further increasing the possibility that people with mental illness may become targets and victims in this pre-emptive screening of terrorists, *TK #581* identifies people who appear to be under the influence of drugs as another sure sign that they are prospective terrorists: 'To overcome nervousness, some suicide bombers are given drugs; thus a person in a drug-induced state is another red flag.'²⁴ People who are medicated with anti-psychotic and anti-depressant drugs often appear visibly drugged, as the symptomatic effects of these drugs include lethargy, tunnel-vision, sluggish movement and dilated pupils.

The biotypological profile delineated in *TK #581* circumscribes normative behaviour through a preclusionary movement that excises the trope of excess from both ends of the normative spectrum: for example, excess movement and fidgeting on one side and, on the

other, excess stupefaction. In the centre, between these two extremes, is that normative template against which the mad, the fanatical, the disabled, the non-Western and non-Christian are measured and identified. Things, however, even in the Disneyfied world of *TK #581*, are not that simple. A troubling spectre haunts all the seemingly self-evident preincident indicators of the prospective terrorist. The cunning Oriental, despite everything, is a master stealth-masker:

Of concern is the fact that suicide bombers have been able to blend in with their surroundings by disguising themselves to look like many types of professionals and civilians. Suicide bombers have appeared as military and law enforcement personnel, ambulance drivers, pregnant women, festival attendees, nightclub goers, TV camera crews, university students, and Orthodox Jews.²⁵

In the face of the prospective terrorist's uncanny, undetectable, stealth-masking ability to pass as normative and even exemplary citizen-subject (for example, as law enforcement personnel), the entire edifice of the preincident indicators collapses. Ubiquitous and unknowable precisely because of his or her undetectable impersonation of exemplary citizens beyond suspicion, the terrorist is at once everywhere and nowhere: the terrorist is simultaneously anyone and no one.

Articulated here is the locus of a cultural panic, inscribed by unbounded paranoia and hallucinogenic psychosis, that exceeds all possible structural saturation: nothing is as it seems; everyone is suspect. Identificatory schemas, taxonomic distributions of biotypologies and indices, all are useless in the face of a perverse and unsettling logic in which the figure of virtuous exemplarity—the law enforcement officer—can turn out to be a terrorist. In the psychotic world of *TK #581*, exemplarity and indexicality, whether to signify crime or virtue, good or evil, offer no solid ground upon which to stand in order to evaluate and identify the figure before you, as the embodied exemplarity of virtue can just as easily turn out to be a stealth-masking criminal/terrorist. The indicators of the fabled white, male, middle-class, Western citizen-subject—rationally behaved, business-suited, affluent, credit card-enabled, civic-minded, sporting salon-dyed hair and toiletry restraint—signify, in the last analysis, nothing; or, worse, they signify the terrorist that the law enforcement officer or citizen failed to detect. It is here, caught in the aporetic logic that structures *TK #581*, that the document self-deconstructs in order to reveal an unreal world whose empirico-positivist biotypologies and indicators morph into groundless, shape-shifting phantasmagoria of spectres, doubles and hauntings. *TK #581*, to put it in explicitly Derridaean terms, implodes under the inexorable logic of its own virulent auto-immunity: what was once the identifiable outside—the Muslim terrorist, as the graphic supplement to the Western citizen-subject's

self-same virtuous interiority—has now installed itself within the very heart of the figure of Western exemplarity, effectively erasing all identifiable differences, generating the stealth-masking ruse of the other-as-self-same.²⁶

— ‘FRONTIER’ TECHNOLOGIES IN THE SERVICE OF UNMASKING STEALTH-MASKING

In the face of the ruses and impersonations that a prospective terrorist can deploy in order to dupe human systems of surveillance and identification, so-called ‘frontier’ technologies are being mobilised by law enforcement and military organisations in order to pre-emptively capture terrorists. The use of biometric systems as technologies mobilised to capture suspect subjects in advance of any offence is clearly evidenced in two emergent biometric technologies funded by the US Department of Defence’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA): the video early warning (VEW) system and the human identification at a distance (HID) project. VEW and HID are emergent biometric technologies that will focus on a subject’s ‘behavioural’ features, specifically on the way they walk, that is, on the modality of their gait.

‘When gait research is perfected, its uses for anti-terrorism surveillance will be invaluable,’ says a former program manager at DARPA who asked that his name not be used. He mentions the possibility of having software that would detect whether a stranger walking into a facility is a frightened woman or a terrorist with hidden explosives.²⁷

In his essay ‘Walking in the City’, Michel de Certeau stages a critical re-evaluation of walking by reading the kinesiology of a subject’s walk in terms of rhetorics. In the process, he identifies a number of ‘enunciative functions’ for what he terms ‘pedestrian speech acts’.²⁸ These enunciative functions, amongst other things, serve to make intelligible the seemingly random practice of walking in terms of cultural rhetorics to which can be attributed a series of values, including a ‘truth value,’ an ‘epistemological value,’ and an ‘ethical or legal value’. It is on this last value that I want to focus in order to begin to critically address the cultural politics of gait signature within a biometric counter-terrorist network. The enunciative modality of the walk in term of its ethical or legal value refers to “‘deontic” modalities of the obligatory, the forbidden, the permitted, or the optional. Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories “it speaks”’.²⁹

The biometric conceptualisation of a subject’s walk as constitutive of an identificatory ‘signature’ perfectly dovetails with de Certeau’s theorisation of a subject’s walk as ineluctably inscribed by a rhetorical systematicity. In the language of biometrics, the rhetorical systematicity of a gait signature is ‘characterized by the joint angles between body segments and their relationships to the events of the gait cycle’.³⁰ In biometrics, however, this rhetorical ‘periodicity of human gait motion’ is predicated on a set of gait algorithms entirely removed from the socio-cultural contexts within which all subjects are situated and within which the

biometric algorithms are themselves constructed. In contrast, de Certeau's approach insists precisely on situating patterns of human locomotion within the dense socio-cultural fabric that inflects a subject's kinematic characteristics.

Viewed in this light, biometric uses of gait signature for counter-terrorist practices must be seen as conceptually situated within the domain of *deontology*, as locus of the ethical, the legal, the transgressive and the criminal. The tracking of suspect subjects will rely on the involuntary disclosure of the unique modality of their walk; their walk, both literally and metaphorically, signs or articulates the letters of their 'name' with every ambulatory step they take.

And the target doesn't have to be doing a Michael Jackson moonwalk to be distinctive because the radar detects small frequency shifts in the reflected signal off legs, arms and the torso in a combination of different speeds and directions. 'There's a signature that's somewhat unique to the individual', says [Gene] Greneker [Georgia Institute of Technology, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency]. 'We've demonstrated proof of this'.³¹

The gait signature of the target subject will disclose whether they are listed on the Pentagon's Total Information Awareness (TIA) database:

a vast surveillance system ... [c]onceived and managed by retired [Iran-Contragate's] Adm. John Pointdexter ... TIA is an effort to design breakthrough software 'for treating these databases as a virtual, centralized grand database' capable of being quickly mined by counter-intelligence officers even though the data will be held in many places, many languages and many formats.³²

In *TK #581*'s bullet-point profile of suicide bombers, kinesiology is seen to supply this preincident indicator: '*An unusual gait, especially a robotic walk*. This could indicate someone forcing or willing himself or herself to go through with a mission.'³³ The normative kinesiological regime inscribed in this preincident indicator overlaps with the encoding of 'normal' and 'deviant' gaits in the operations of gait signature technology. In the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, for example, Linda Rothstein describes how gait signature technology will enable the detection of criminals or terrorists in advance of their having committed any offence: 'Perhaps then we will see proud police officers, when asked how they were able to apprehend some criminal or terrorist, explain simply, "There was something funny about the way he walked".'³⁴ Inscribed in the operational logic of gait signature is the disciplinary intertwining of biotypology and anthropometry. A visually identifiable 'normal' or 'deviant' biotypology of gait is technologically measured through anthropometric software in order to produce an effective result. In this case, the external biotypology of a subject's gait, measured against presupposed normative standards, will disclose an internal moral morphology: the

'funny' walk of the target subject will disclose his or her incipient criminal mind. Gait signature must, in this biopolitical context, be situated, as I argued above, in the well-established domain of those other infamous anthropometric sciences dependent on visible corporeal indices in order to disclose the internal (im)moral qualities of target subjects: phrenology, physiognomics and craniology.³⁵

The visible preincident kinesiological indicators of suicide bombers—the so-called 'robotic walk' and/or 'funny' walk—are predicated on a disciplinary biopolitical regime of able bodies that know of no physical or psychological impediment to walking as such. Gait signature screening will, I would argue, inevitably catch in its net people with walking disabilities precisely because they fail to conform to a normative 'template' walk, especially if these subjects are, in addition, marked by racially charged biotypological indices (for example, 'of Middle Eastern appearance'). The disciplinary dimensions of this kinesiological regime become clearly apparent for people with walking disabilities when situated in the context of so-called 'gait training' videos that demand the kinesiological 'rectification' of a disabled subject's gait so that it conforms to a normative template.³⁶ Articulated here is the discursive convergence between technologies of surveillance and identification and disciplinary regimes of biopolitical normativity.

John Woodward Jr, former director of the US Department's Defense Biometrics Management Office, in his 'Using Biometrics to Achieve Identity Dominance in the Global War on Terrorism', writes:

Just as the US military has established its superiority in other arts of war, now, working with other US government organizations, it must strive for identity dominance over terrorist and national-security threats who pose harm to American lives and interests. In the context of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), identity dominance means US authorities could link an enemy combatant or similar national-security threat to his previously used identities and past activities, particularly as they relate to terrorism and other crimes.³⁷

In the context of the GWOT, it is biometric technologies that are being deployed by the United States to help achieve this. Woodward argues that: 'We can use biometric technology to achieve identity dominance and must deploy it to meet the requirements of force protection, actionable intelligence, and law enforcement. Establishing identity dominance through a comprehensive [biometric system] will enable the US military to identify friend or foe to keep America safer.'³⁸

The emergence of this new term, 'identity dominance,' enunciates the assimilation of biometric technologies into the configuration of United States empire, war and bodies. The contours of this matrix of empire, war and bodies are marked by what Woodward calls an 'approach that is multitheater, multiservice, multifunctional, and multibiometric'.³⁹



In the multitheatres of US imperial war, multibiometric systems dream of differentiating ‘friend from foe’. Gait signature, iris scan, facial scan, finger scan—all are now mobilised in this multiservice exercise of imperial power. The term ‘frontier’ technologies positions these new technologies within the historical context of expansionary relations of colonial and imperial power: ‘frontier’ technologies signify both the inexorable teleological progress of Western technology and the consequent deployment of new technologies in securing and consolidating the borders or ‘frontiers’ of empire.⁴⁰ In the midst of multitheatre imperial US wars and their deployment of multibiometric systems are the occupied bodies of colonised subjects. In this context, these bodies are captured, biometrically scanned and their data is networked within US interoperational databases.

A recent issue of the *New York Times* published a photo of US troops taking a retina scan of an Iraqi citizen with the gloss: ‘Trying to Distinguish Friend From Foe On Baghdad’s Streets: An American soldier took a retina scan yesterday to identify an Iraqi after the search of his house in Mansour, a western Baghdad neighbourhood that has been torn apart by sectarian violence’ (see figure 1).⁴¹ Violence in Baghdad is here scripted as something indigenous to the Iraqi people indulging their native predisposition to ‘sectarian violence’. Nothing is mentioned here of the imperial war unfolding in Iraq, or of the years of US imposed sanctions that crippled the possibility for Iraqi citizens to mobilise against Saddam Hussein’s

Figure 1: *Trying to Distinguish Friend From Foe on Baghdad’s Streets*
An Arabic translator helps a US soldier from the 3-2 Stryker Brigade take a retina scan of an Iraqi man after his house was searched in Baghdad’s Mansour district, 3 April 2007
Photographer: Bob Strong. Source: Reuters. Courtesy Picture Media

regime; nothing is mentioned here of the 600,000 civilian Iraqi dead that have been documented as victims of the United States-led Iraqi war.⁴²

Situated within the elided context of imperial war, this image graphically represents the exercise of invasive power and control by the US military over the bodies of Iraqi citizens. This image of US troops forcing an Iraqi citizen to undergo a retina scan evidences the material instantiation of imperial *geocorpographies* of violence.⁴³ Iraqi citizens no longer have autonomy or control over their own bodies, more specifically over the biometric identifiers of their own bodies. The bodies of Iraqi citizens are here seen to have become geocorpographically co-extensive with the imperially invaded and controlled terrain of Iraq. As coextensive with the imperially occupied terrain of Iraq, they are compelled to submit to a systemic exercise of power that mines their biometric signatures. The invasiveness that is represented in this image ramifies on a number of levels. In the photo, the eye of the Iraqi citizen is literally prised open by a US soldier as the other secures a biometric scan of his retina. As subjects living under the regime of imperial occupation, Iraqi citizens are non-citizen subjects within their own nation. The physical prising open of a US citizen's eye in order to obtain a retina scan would constitute immediate grounds for a lawsuit. In contradistinction, Iraqi bodies must be made available to the demands of the occupying power. This is the 'open access' to both terrain and bodies that imperial powers both demand and exact from their occupied subjects. The biometric signatures of Iraqi citizens are now being collected by the US military and stored as so much data in a massive interoperational biometric database in order to facilitate the differentiation between so-called 'friend and foe'—moral categories that are exclusively determined by the 'moral epistemology of imperialism'.⁴⁴ Virtually existent across multiple US databases, these *in silico* biosignatures are digitally mobilised in order to secure 'identity dominance.' On the ground, in the harrowed context of war, the lived reality of these occupied bodies of Iraqi citizens constitute another form of biometric signature altogether—a painfully lived signature inscribed by non-virtual violence and shadowed by death.

— SO YOU'RE AFRAID OF WHAT? STEALTH-MASKING UNMASKED

On 24 April 2007, a report was released on the New South Wales police's ongoing use of the ethnic descriptor 'of Middle Eastern appearance.' The report stated that:

NSW police use the description Middle Eastern too frequently in media releases, skewing the perception of crime rates and contributing to racial tensions ... The report said up to two-thirds of the police media releases that mentioned ethnicity referred to suspects of Mediterranean or Middle Eastern appearance. This was a disproportionate use, said Peter El Khouri, a member of the council [that released the report] ... 'There is a perception

that the Middle Eastern community, Australians of Middle Eastern background, are significantly responsible for the crime in the state,' Mr El Khouri said.⁴⁵

Located in the contemporary GWOT context, the ethnic descriptor 'of Middle Eastern appearance' is clearly enmeshed in the configuration of a cultural panic.⁴⁶ All of the key elements identified by Stanley Cohen as constitutive of a cultural panic inscribe this charged ethnic descriptor, including rhetorical strategies of 'exaggeration,' 'prediction' and 'symbolization'.⁴⁷ The elements of exaggeration and distortion clearly mark the use of this ethnic descriptor, as the report I cited above names the manner in which the over-use of this descriptor by the police functions to exaggerate and distort the actual rate of crime committed by people of Middle Eastern background in the state of New South Wales. It is, however, the more interesting process of symbolisation in fomenting cultural panics that I want to bring into focus here.

In his analysis of the process of symbolisation, Cohen argues that: 'a word (Mod) becomes symbolic of a certain status (delinquent or deviant); objects (hairstyle, clothing) symbolize the word; the objects themselves become symbolic of the status (and the emotions attached to the status)'.⁴⁸ Transposing Cohen's thesis to the police use of the ethnic descriptor 'of Middle Eastern appearance', this ethnic descriptor has become symbolic of a taken-for-granted criminal status.⁴⁹ What object, however, functions automatically to symbolise this ethnic descriptor, its criminal status and the cluster of emotions (fear, anxiety, terror) that it generates in the general public? Embedded in the above-cited report on police over-use of this ethnic descriptor is this extraordinary disclosure: 'The [NSW police] service constantly ignores its policy on the use of ethnic descriptions and has even issued releases referring to suspects wearing balaclavas as being of Mediterranean or Middle Eastern appearance.'⁵⁰

Articulated in this revelation is the symbolic conflation of an object (balaclava) with a racialised ethnic identity (of Mediterranean or Middle Eastern appearance) that marks a criminal figure in advance of the fact of his or her having committed any crime. Operative here is a racialised *somatechnics* of identity in the service of cultural panics. Somatechnics refers to the indissociable way in which the body of a subject is always already technologised and mediated by cultural inscriptions.⁵¹ The face of a figure 'of Middle Eastern appearance' is, in this context, already inextricably interchangeable with the somatechnology of the balaclava—precisely as symbol of the terrorist and the criminal. The racialised phenotypical features of the face 'of Middle Eastern appearance' are already tautological in their relation to that hyperbolic symbol of terror: the balaclava. The textural contours of the balaclava articulate the phenotypical morphology of the ethnic descriptor 'of Middle Eastern appearance', regardless of the fact the mask occludes the actual phenotypical identificatory features of the face. The balaclava is a somatechnology precisely because it biopolitically intextuates an ethnic descriptor onto the face of the target subject.



Figure 2: Reza Aramesh,
Carboot Sale: Palm Trees Sold,
 2004

If, as I demonstrated above, the logic of the *Training Key #581* document pivots on disclosing all the possible stealth-masking tactics and ruses of the prospective (Muslim/Arab) terrorist, then the naming of the balaclava by the New South Wales police as metonymically interchangeable with the ethnic descriptor 'of Middle Eastern appearance' articulates the ultimate ruse of un/masking: in effect, there is never any unmasking of the terrorist as such, as the face 'of Middle Eastern appearance' cannot be, structurally, unmasked; to strip away the balaclava is already to impose the ethnic descriptor that the mask signifies. The aporia of this double movement constitutes a double bind for the figure 'of Middle Eastern appearance': she or he cannot be 'read,' in the context of the West's cultural panic over this figure, as citizen-subject who is innocent of having perpetrated a crime until proven guilty by due legal process. On the contrary, the figure 'of Middle Eastern appearance' is precluded from occupying that locus. In advance of the fact of having committed any crime, they are already criminalised: the phenotypicity of their face-as-balaclava-proxy enunciates as much; recursively, the somatechnology of balaclava-as-ethnic-descriptor-proxy (re)iterates as much.

The fraught politico-cultural terrain that I have been traversing has been brilliantly mapped in the sardonic artwork of the British Iranian artist Reza Aramesh. Across a number of installations, Aramesh has brought into critical focus the racialised charge of the face 'of Middle Eastern appearance'-as-balaclava-proxy-for criminalisation. In his *Carboot Sale: Palm Trees Sold* (figure 2), Aramesh has three suited, balaclava-masked figures situated in the space of an actual car boot sale held in a warehouse in East London. Within the parameters of this civico-mercantile space, Aramesh mobilised three men of Middle Eastern background (a

doctor, a television and film producer and a criminal lawyer) and had them don balaclavas as they ‘illegally’ hawked their wares: palm trees sold from a car boot.

As Orientalised metonyms of the Middle East, the palm trees are the ‘hot’ merchandise that stand in contradistinction to the cool artwork that hangs on the walls. Aramesh, however, overturns this dichotomy by playing on the indissociable double bind that inscribes the logic of the mask. On the one hand, the balaclava-masked men tautologically signify criminal-non-citizen Middle Eastern subjects who can only appear within the context of civic spaces as always already criminal ‘types’, in contradistinction to the unmasked citizen-subjects milling around them and their palm trees. Yet Aramesh’s work brings into crisis the very rhetorical status of the mask: if a balaclava is at once tautological in terms of a particular phenotypical configuration of racist stereotypes and ethnic descriptors, the viewer is compelled to ask: what ‘masks’ are the seemingly unmasked citizen-subjects also inscribed with? What are the phenotypical features of a face that allow a subject the privilege to occupy a civic space untrammelled by racist stereotypes? What racialised features are so privileged within raciological relations of power that the cultural construction/mask of one’s phenotypicality is effectively *invisibilised*? In other words, what are the relations of power that enable one to traverse civic spaces as though one were not wearing a mask—that is, as though one’s face were not always already somatechnologically intextuated by a cluster of cultural significations? Aramesh further amplifies the complex logic of the double bind that inscribes the mask-as-non-mask in his use of the palms as Orientalised proxies of illegality and criminality. The illegal status of the palms, as ‘hot’ merchandise that is being sold by self-evidently criminal types, is at once resignified by their location in a civic space: their very status as illegal booty is simultaneously resignified as they become artworks reflexively commenting on the processual nature of politico-cultural construction and commodification.

The figure of the balaclava-as-proxy for the face ‘of Middle Eastern appearance’ is in Aramesh’s *The Eternal Spring* contextualised within the private space of the home. Even within the confines of this private space, Aramesh suggests that the logic of the racialised mask is inescapable. His staging of a choreography of relaxed and homely postures—lounging, kneeling, reclining—is problematised by the somatechnics of the balaclava. As the somatechnology of the balaclava is fused to a set of racialised phenotypical features, it becomes impossible to remove it—even within the domestic confines of one’s home space. In this sense, the homely atmosphere of this domestic scene is already rendered unhomely, uncanny. A spectrality of threat and violence haunts this scene. None of the domestic objects—the hookah, the Oriental rug, the flowers—can vitiate this sense of threat. The very fact that one of the male figures is unmasked only serves to confirm this fact: enmeshed within the charged choreography of *visibly* masked figures, he represents the embodied tautology of the balaclava-as-proxy-for-the-criminal-face-of-Middle-Eastern-appearance.



Figure 3: Reza Aramesh, *The Eternal Spring*, 2004

In the play of mirrors, the naked figure of the woman embodies the stereotypical gendered dimensions of this double logic of the mask-as-truth. A reflection caught in double reflections, the naked figure of the woman signifies the Nietzschean burden of the untruth of truth, of the appearance of all reality:

There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted herself. Out of the depths ... she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity and property ... There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of that untruth of that abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is 'truth'.⁵²

The reflection of the naked woman in Aramesh's image stages the rhetoricity and literality of this gendered double logic. Her literal turning away from the men and the spectator instantiates the tropological dimensions of this turn. Through this move, the cliché of one of Western philosophy's 'eternal verities' is both performed and mocked in the embodied gendered reflection of 'eternal spring' as appearance (reflection) of appearance (image): she averts in order to underscore this rhetorical undoing of essentiality and identity—to be unmasked is already to be masked. Doubling this effect, the unmasked young man with averted gaze echoes as much.



So you're afraid of what? You know the type: every gesture a threat, every move a violence. Lolling on your bed of roses, swarthy, hirsute, unAmerican beauty, you avert your eyes. Hooded figure of terror, momentarily rendered vulnerable and exposed—naked, offering your self up for love. So you're afraid of what—the palpability of flesh, the violent mask of this face that cannot be removed, even in this most intimate of moments?

Figure 4: Reza Aramesh, *So You're Afraid of What: Avi on a Bed of Roses*, 2004

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| 3. <i>Training Key #581 Suicide (Homicide) Bombers: Part 1</i> (hereafter <i>TK #581</i>) is available at: < www.theiacp.org/pubinfo/IACP581SuicideBombersPart1.pdf >. | 7. Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i> , Penguin, New York, 1991, p. 27. |
| 4. <i>TK #581</i> , p. 2. | 8. Said, p. 107. |
| | 9. <i>TK #581</i> , p. 3. |
| | 10. <i>TK #581</i> , p. 3. |
| | 11. Martin Chulov, 'Treatment has Sheik Wary of Returning Home', <i>The Weekend Australian</i> , 6–7 January 2007, p. 2. |
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