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Repurposing Feminist Geopolitics: On Estrangement, Exhaustion and the End of the Solar System

I am sincerely grateful to the reviewers for their thoughtful, always insightful and constructive comments. Reading these has allowed me to approach the book, which I thought I knew so well, anew. It has certainly brought into sharp perspective concerns that, whilst they animated the writing of *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States*, were nevertheless implicitly articulated, or hedged in by a series of qualifying statements. **Jennifer Hyndman's** trenchant observations, for example, as to the ambitions of the book are absolutely correct. The intent in retrieving phenomena crucial to the making of a classical geopolitics, and yet 'made strange' in the process, is not to formulate an explanatory mode of inquiry that supplants and replaces what has gone before – as she notes, the book is not a rewriting or refutation of feminist geopolitics as it has been demarcated over the past fifteen years. It is, rather, a conjuring of a feminist geopolitics that gains its substance from the sceptical apprehension of, gathering together and re-evaluation of some of these estranged phenomena (flesh, bones, abhorrence and touch), and that presents to us a politics that is not only a matter of world-making, but of being of the Earth. Underlying such a project is indeed a deep-seated frustration not with how feminist geopolitics has been practiced, but with a tendency amongst those accounting for the history and philosophy of the discipline to summarily demarcate the work thus achieved as a 'corrective' to a critical geopolitics that, it seems, requires more attentiveness to the body.

For me, feminist scholarship is concerned not with bodies *per se* as interesting objects of analysis, nor even as knowing bodies, but with a feeling for the borders of thought and practice as these pertain to violence and suffering, marginalisation and exploitation, generosity and hope, peace and well-being. This is a thoroughly haptic endeavour that eschews the sharp-edged sureties of frames and taxonomies, subjects and their others, surfaces and borders. Small wonder, then, that when brought to bear in a consideration of geopolitics, for so long concerned with a rising above and pacification of the flesh (especially feared when contagious, whether through the passions or pathogens), such an analysis finds so much of the body to interrogate and problematise. This is an ironic move, as Jennifer rightly observes, insofar as the emphasis and elaboration upon smashed and broken bodies, body parts, mis-begotten bodies, wounded bodies and so on comes not from my adoption of a feminist approach, as one might have expected, but from the diverse coporealities posited and enacted upon by a classical geopolitics. In similar vein, **Sara Smith** comments that such a feminist analysis "veers into" an examination of how the materialities of bodies of the body ripple through the body politic, "creating a geopolitics of abhorrence that is corporeally situated in relation to proliferating Others" (ref). With a gaze firmly fixed on futures to come, my choice was to 'presence' debates not generally denoted as geopolitical alongside the ontologies they invoked; but also to unfold time and again phenomena and their contexts that, accumulating over the course of the book, evoke a sense of contingency. Indeed, the key challenge was to uproot once more phenomena that a classical geopolitics had estranged, while resisting the siren call to construct an explanatory framework that exhausted their agency and affect. What I hope has been gained from the choices made is a sense of feminist geopolitics as a field that is very much shaped by such congruencies, but also the phenomena that we apprehend yet never fully capture or contain.

Small wonder also that such a feminist analysis finds inspiration in the writings of scholars such as Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, both of whom have developed a broad-based feminist materialism from an initial delving into the fraught times and spaces of the monstrous, whether in

the form of natural history's deployment of teratological specimens to advance a racialised heteronormativity (Braidotti 1999) or the intolerable ambiguity of the freak (Grosz 1991). To raise the issue of monstrosity is to delve into the condition and limits of a humanness, and it is but a small step to consider not only how those conditions and limits are the product of power relations, but also the place of what lies on the other side of these: phenomena posited as more than human, less than human, abhuman, inhuman or unhuman. And, as [first name] Bosworth notes, the chapter in the book dedicated to abhorrence has become something of a 'foreshadowing' of the intensification of a hyper-conservative Gothic politics under President-elect Donald Trump, but also across Europe and Asia also. The social media campaigning I track in *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States* seems small fare just a year later when compared with the multi-media virulency of conspiracy theory as a means of making sense of one's place in the world via capitalism, religion, race, gender, sexuality and the physical systems of the planet itself. As numerous academics have pointed out, the tenebrous, threatening atmosphere of the Gothic is by no means new – it is part and parcel of a complex 'political somatics' inherited from the European Enlightenment. Richard Devetak's (2005) brilliant interrogation of the Gothic's cultivation of affective atmospheres insists time and again not on the counter-play of a cultivation of fear and attraction, dread and pleasure, but their combined work in instigating a broad-based arts and science curiosity as to the nature of human being.

I do wonder, however, if Bosworth has misapprehended my argument on monstrousness more generally; a misapprehension that stems from the assumption that I take European Enlightenment thought to be a matter of purification and stratification, such that aberrant and anomalous monsters become a counter-narrative that interrupts and disturbs such equanimities. Yet, what I strive to argue in the book is that monsters are themselves not only time and place specific figurations, but can work to seal as well as to open up social ruptures. While 'mis-begotten' portents, for example, were feared as animating febrile imaginations, they also helped to make sense of revolution; teratological specimens demonstrated the need for a bio-politics, but also nature as a hybrid-producing machine that could be appropriated in state-building; and even the pleasurable thrill afforded by the abjection of Gothic monsters could be refashioned into a warning on fascism. Indeed, far from being the counter-refrain to a classical geopolitics, "bones, monsters, flesh, and touch" were well and truly part of an Enlightened experimentation with bodies. On a related note, I don't think that I do follow a "standard critique" of an Enlightenment Cartesian split between mind and body, such that feminism, in foregrounding the liminal geographies (for example, monsters) so produced, provides a "corrective". The example of Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) is instructive here, insofar as while her research provided a reflection on and alternative to the prevailing Cartesian separation of the knowing mind from the known world, the existence of her Parisian salon was allowed for in large part by this same philosophical rumination on the separation of the female intellect from the frailties of the female body. What is more, to advocate a feminist materialism as a means of feeling for difference in thought and practice – and looking to Scudéry for inspiration in the process - does not equate with an uncritical acceptance of the (necro as well as bio-political) experimentations of capitalism. Clearly there are particular affordances [first name] is placing on the term 'material' that are generative of a structuralist project, but it would also be useful to consider the affordances given to the term 'difference.' On the subject of feminisms more generally, I do take pains to note time and again a congruency one finds between not only the individualism of geopolitics and a particular variant of Western, modern feminist activism, but a *realpolitik* also. [First name] is correct to observe that I do not posit an externalist critique of this and similar variants;

instead, I stress how diverse feminisms are materially situated, and “thus animate a set of concerns that not only speak to some groupings over and against others, but that have been imagined and articulated in response to particular power relations and in light of specific capacities for action” (2015: 3). Thinking about the context within which I am re-reading the book, what looms large to my mind is the spewed-out proliferation across social media as much as academia of the term ‘identity politics.’ What kinds of estrangements are being enacted here?

Jason Dittmer’s juxtaposition of *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States* and *The Wrath of Khan* is a useful one for my re-reading of the book, insofar as its consequent *mis-en-scène* traverses difference as both hoped for and feared, fecund and destructive, produced for excess and controlled for. I set out to conjure a feminist geopolitics I could work with moving forward into the Anthropocene, recognising my own often fraught situatedness in feminism and poststructuralism, and in the process found myself undertaking a creative reading not only of geography’s back catalogue, but the arts and humanities, and hard sciences, also. All of which led me to a final chapter that outlines not only a series of conceptual *personae* in the vein of Braidotti (2013) that promise analytic purchase, as well as a corporeal morphing, of otherwise ineffable conditions such as the Anthropocene, but also an outline of a ter[r]aformed planet that is neither scaled nor externalised, but yet which situates such *personae*. In which case, I would suggest another allegory for the book that pivots not around the Treaty of Westphalia, 1648, but the death of the Sun. In 1993, Jean-François Lyotard wrote a fable that sketched out how all of the efforts of a modern humankind were geared towards a leaving of the Earth (Lyotard, 1997). Such an effort might possibly allow some form of humanity to survive, but such a leave-taking also intimated an awareness, at some unconscious level, that the Earth -- the geological archive -- was no longer sufficient to hold the memory of our existence as a species. To be sure, we can take from this a reflection on the challenges posed to an Earth-rooted philosophical tradition - transcendent in its immanence - by the inhumanness of the cosmos. But what I find appealing about Lyotard’s fable is the emphasis on memory, and how this ostensibly human capacity is entangled in the mass movement of soil, the uplift of plates, the diversion of air currents, the laying down of a stratum composed of concrete, plastic and chicken bones, and the division of cells. From this perspective, the Treaty of Westphalia starts to take on the form of a fossil, mineralised in the pages of books such as *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States*.

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