Book Review

Pugliese, Joseph (2010) *Biometrics: Bodies, Technologies, Biopolitics*. London: Routledge
179pp. \$103.00 (US) hardback. ISBN: 0-415-87487-8

Benjamin J. Muller

King's University College at the University of Western Ontario, Canada. bmuller@uwo.ca

In his essay, *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger makes the now infamous assertion that all technology is human, and all humans are technological. Although not overtly referencing Heidegger, in challenging the false assumptions about the alleged objectivity and neutrality of biometric technologies, Pugliese's account in *Biometrics: Bodies, Technologies, Biopolitics*, takes a similar tact. Within the framework of 'somatechnics' and 'geocorpographies', Pugliese's analysis of biometrics unpacks the dual biopolitical concerns of an 'infrastructural calibration of whiteness' (p.64), and the intimate relationship between geopolitical bodies and biopolitical technologies (p.92), that are integral to the evolution and application of this technology. These claims are not only well supported throughout the text, but Pugliese's arguments, informed by critical theory and cultural studies, forms a strong contribution to ongoing political debates over the application and implication of biometric technologies.

As deputy director of the Somatechnics Research Centre at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia Pugliese provides an inspired account of the somatechnics of biometrics. A relatively new concept that emphasizes the intimate linkages between *soma*, which refers to the body as a culturally intelligible construct, and *techne*, or technology and techniques through which the body is (trans)formed, somatechnics considers the extent to which bodies are constituted through technology. In the case of biometrics, it is not that technology is simply *added* to the body, but that specific articulations and constitutions of the body, its positioning and life, occur through this technology. As Pugliese notes, the body is always and already inscribed with a system of technological mediations, and therefore, a complex politics is deployed when claims of (in)visibility are made. Statements regarding 'the body as the password' are critically unpacked by Pugliese, highlighting both the importance of the colonial genealogy of these technologies, and the contemporary reconstitutions of the body that result from these biometric techniques.

Throughout much of the text, Pugliese teases out the 'dense sociocultural and historical significations' of the designers of biometrics. Drawing on pivotal contributions such as Simon Cole's critical history of fingerprinting in *Suspect Identities* (2001), Pugliese exposes the resonances of social Darwinism in the history of biometrics. In so doing, he provides a powerful critique of the bulk of the scientific literature provided by Woodward and others, whose own anorexic history of biometrics provides little more than a market driven valorization of this prolific technology. Unpacking what Pugliese calls the 'infrastructural whiteness' of biometrics not only speaks to its colonial genealogy, but also the extent to which the prospect of visibility so central to the application of these technologies becomes inextricably linked to practices of whiteness and racial superiority. Qualitative evaluations of fingerprints for biometrics are linked to both race and gender, such as the 'lower quality fingerprints of Asians and women' (p.64) Pugliese cites. In addition to the 'somatechnical' aspects of Pugliese's problematization of biometrics and

the apolitical and ahistorical representation of these technologies, he considers what he calls the 'geocorpographies' at stake.

Emphasizing the relationship between geopolitical bodies and the biopolitical technologies of inscription, surveillance, and control (p.92), Pugliese considers the strategic use of biometrics in differentiating friend from foe in what Agnew refers to as the 'territorial trap' of global politics. In describing biometrics as 'genealogically situated within regimes of truth, predicated on positivist ontologies of the visible', Pugliese draws clear lines from the colonial and social Darwinist history of identification technologies, and the constitution and representation of bodies. Perhaps more than any other example, the strategic use of the 'Biometrics Automated Toolset (BAT)' by the US Marines in Iraq demonstrates how close to its genealogy biometrics remains. As others have argued (Measor and Muller 2010), the use of the BAT in Iraq is preoccupied with 'visibility' in the most nefarious political and racially motivated ways. Pugliese takes this argument further in highlighting the extent to which this not only extends the historical and colonial legacy of biometrics and identification technologies more generally, but the manner in which bodies are reconstituted and rendered visible.

In addition to the example of the BAT in Iraq, Pugliese investigates another important and obvious site for the contemporary geocorpographies of biometrics: the border. Although Pugliese's references on the 'biometric border' are minimal, relying primarily on Amoore's article, his analysis nevertheless complements much of this literature, which includes the likes of Lyon, Muller, Salter, and others. Certainly the portability of the border, or the way in which the proliferation of borders and bordering practices is enabled vis-à-vis biometrics fits well with Pugliese's argument on the inscription of these technologies on the body. Again, contra the popular scientific literature on biometrics, whose banal if existent appraisal of political, legal, and social considerations is thin and without irony, Pugliese's account underscores the extent to which the border is to some extent made portable through the inscriptive technologies of biometrics. At the point of enrolment into biometric programmes the inscription and (re)constitution of gender, race, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, even danger, is made. Certainly the cases of a Palestinian labourer and the EU's Eurodac information system provided by Pugliese are convincing examples of how 'the biometric body is geocorpographically and somatechnically mediated' (p.160), and sits well with the critical literature from Surveillance Studies, Critical Security Studies, and International Political Sociology that has begun to address similar concerns surrounding the politics of these technologies and their applications.

At a time when the securitization of mobility is so ubiquitous it has become almost banal, and the proliferation of the exceptional politics of the border extends outwards and proliferate, whether through the invasive checks in airports or the invocation of state legislation such as Arizona's SB-1070, technology is regularly represented as a benign panacea to the alleged dangers of mobility. Pugliese's account is exceptional in its problematization of such claims. By effectively ensconcing the evolution of biometrics in a colonial history leading to 'infrastructural whiteness', and exposing the positivist ontologies of the *visible* that enable biometrics, Pugliese's argument that the 'biometric body' is mediated and constituted both geocorpographically and somatechnically provides a powerful counter argument to the ubiquitous arguments of technological inevitability, the extent to which technology allows any escape from racial profiling, and general claims about the banality of (in)visibility.

References

- Cole, S. 2001. *Suspect Identities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Measor, J. and Muller, B.J. 2010. Securitizing the global norm of identity: Biometrics and Homo Sacer in Fallujah. In *Security, risk, and the biometric state: Governing borders and bodies*, ed. B.J. Muller, 102-117. Routledge: London.