

Theory & Event

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Volume 16, Issue 2, 2013

Johns Hopkins University Press



Article

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Cartographies of Capture

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Abstract

This article provides a thematic overview of the work of contemporary French philosopher Grégoire Chamayou. It suggests that the notion of violent capture serves as a guiding theme linking Chamayou's work, linking it to his early study of experimental medicine, his genealogy of manhunting and predatory power, as well as his recent study of contemporary predatory or "cynegetic" warfare use of drones.

The accompanying article, "Fichte's Passport: a Philosophy of the Police", was first prepared for a research colloquium at the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Berlin in 2010. At that time, its author, Grégoire Chamayou,¹ was directing the working group "Machines of Memory - Archival Technologies and the Genealogy of Datapower." The objective of the group was to map the implementation of a specifically archival form of power, a "datapower" operating through the capture, storage, and retrieval of information. The genealogical project addressed both discursive and nondiscursive "mnemotechnic" apparatuses, from RFID chips and cattle husbandry to the securitarian ideology of risk assessment, a "heterogeneous ensemble consisting of concepts, institutions, procedures, regulatory decisions, and scientific knowledge."² Its aim was to map the relation between the history of archival techniques and the formation of "new ways of managing men, animals, and things."³

Datapower is to be distinguished from the regime of panoptic surveillance theorized by Foucault. Certainly, both involve a flow of writing and recording adapted to the imperatives of police power. However, as Chamayou points out, there are important differences. The reports and documentation that issue from panoptic mechanisms still presuppose the gaze of an observer, an optical instance that serves as a mediation between the observed object and the archive that is structurally prior to the flow of writing generated about it. By contrast, datapower refashions environments according to a schema of traceability which, under ideal circumstances, would be embedded within the material conditions of action itself, such that every movement, exchange, or interaction within its matrix would immediately and automatically generate and store a decipherable trace. This trace will henceforth be available for future investigations, thereby establishing through technological means the future anterior legibility of every event. As opposed to the presentism of the panoptic effect of being-made-visible, you *will have been* captured by the archive.

Of course, nothing prevents a reciprocal articulation of regimes of local surveillance and centralized control upon one another. Indeed, Chamayou elsewhere describes a remarkable illustrated manuscript from 1749 penned by a certain Jacques François Guillauté and dedicated to Louis XV, in which the French mechanical engineer and police officer proposes to reform the system of the police through the introduction of a novel centralized technology of traceability.⁴ The proposal calls for the construction of archival hubs to house massive rotary card file machines storing reports on every citizen in the city. This file system, dubbed "le serres papiers" or "the Paperholder", when carefully combined with routinized and coded practices of local surveillance and a system of passports regulating movement, was to be so efficient in the reception and retrieval of data as to create a sort of archival double of

the city, updated virtually in real-time. From the control center of such an archive, the sovereign would have a detailed scriptural portrait conferring visibility upon every event and individual in the territory, and enabling a perspective at once massifying and magnifying. Through a combination of efficient data storage, an indexical ordering of space, place, and movement, as well as an intensified local surveillance, the Paperholder is Guillaute's dream of a perfect regulation of the entire city in accordance with police principles. Despite its never being implemented, as Chamayou notes, "Guillaute's dystopian machine is one of the first models of a new technology of control based upon a principle of a generalized traceability. [...] Despite its old fashioned appearance, this wooden machine anticipates a powerful contemporary trend."⁵ The Paperholder presents us with a compact model of a police technology of capture, the abstract diagram of a regime of "dataveillance" that continues to be integrated across diverse domains of society today.⁶

Technologies of capture form a persistent theme in Chamayou's philosophical corpus. They are a central motif his 2008 *Vile Bodies - Experimentation on Human Beings in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*,⁷ a counter-history of modern experimental medicine. The book is not a history of how politics and science interacted, but a *political history* of medical science itself. In this respect *Vile Bodies* distinguishes itself from conventional history of medicine as well as the discourse of medical ethics. The contradictions it aims to draw out are neither the effect of an external impingement of the political upon a separate institution, nor are they reducible to ethical matters internal to the framework of medical experiment, such as the legal or moral content of its procedures themselves. Rather, Chamayou's focus is on the "*technopolitical history of the experimental sciences* considered as apparatuses of acquisition."⁸ With this perspectival shift, our attention is drawn away from the classical figures of French medical history, the Louis Pasteurs and Claude Bernards, toward a different element in the experimental theatre, namely, the bodies from which science extracts its cognitive surplus value.

On the one hand, is a question of the social distribution of risks in scientific research. Historically, the question was not 'can one experiment on humans?', but rather 'on *which* humans can one experiment?'⁹ If there is to be a group of people who must endure the risks necessary for scientific experimentation, how are they being selected? The expression *fiat experimentum in corpore vili*, from which the work draws its title, refers to the rule that served to pick out, among those exposed to risk, the individuals whose lives had "the least *value*."¹⁰

Determined to be bodies of little worth, it was prisoners, prostitutes, orphans, slaves, the colonized, the mad, the indigent, the interned, and those condemned to death who served as the "experimental material" out of which modern science harvested its epistemic content. Scientific progress was in this way predicated on a sacrificial logic according to which the most vulnerable, those whose lives were determined to be "not worth living", were made to assume the dangers of experimentation, for the 'good of society.'

At the same time, the *who* is inseparable from the *how* of corporeal capture. Where, and through what means, did the experimental sciences acquire their bodies? Adopting as a point of departure Plato's characterization of the sciences as 'acquisitive' rather than 'productive' arts, since they use words to discursively appropriate things already existing, Chamayou complicates the schema.¹¹ Where medical science is concerned, "cognitive acquisition has as its condition a prior corporeal acquisition ... If science is like a hunt, human experimentation supposes a *certain kind of manhunt*."¹²

The different apparatuses of technopolitical acquisition correspond to the great historical forms assumed by the power of experimentation. The pages of *Vile Bodies* map six such apparatuses, extending from the sovereign right over life and death, through mass inoculations and public aid clinics, to the racial subjection of the colonies.

In each case, facilitating the capture of abjected bodies we find what Chamayou - after Gabriel Marcel - refers to as "techniques of debasement" [*avilissement*], the set of available means for degrading or demeaning specific categories of subjects, materially as well as symbolically.¹³ Such means were not simply thrust upon the field of medicine by an external political apparatus. Often they were intentionally initiated by the doctors themselves: "Progressively, the doctor would no longer arrive from the outside, in order to make use of the bodies that the penal system produced independently of him, but would collaborate in the production of penal death itself, such that by the end of the 18th century there is a veritable medico-penal co-production of execution."¹⁴ To this carceral apparatus of acquisition is elsewhere added a social apparatus designed to draw in the poor, as well as a scientifico-racial one directed upon slaves and indigenous peoples under colonialism.

This "notional exhumation" of the philosophical category *experimentum in corpore vili*, with its related history of social exclusion and brutalization calls for a political philosophy of modern medicine that would challenge the dominant narratives of 'progress' and 'public utility' still invoked today.¹⁵ Such narratives depend upon a reified conception of a unified social totality, one which effaces the sacrificial logic that historically conditions its development. Or else, where the question of sacrifice and risk allocation is raised, experimental practice is framed within an ethico-moral paradigm founded on an abstract and indeterminate subject, and presented

as a moral dilemma of the 'safety of the individual' versus the 'necessity of progress.'¹⁶ Such ethical discourses, adapted to the abstract universality of a legalistic framework, have the effect of concealing the social content of medical practice. The demonstration of the insufficiency of a strictly ethical treatment of the experimental sciences, as well as the urgent need for concepts that account for the relations of power and degradation that structure the field of knowledge production, constitutes one of the abiding contributions of this work. As Chamayou asks, "Can we still pose the problem of experimentation on humans without ever acknowledging - and in spite of all the historical evidence - that it was always a question of a practice carried out on *certain humans* rather than others?"¹⁷

Two years later another major work extends this analysis of the techniques of capture across four continents and two millennia. *Manhunts - A Philosophical History*, a translation of which recently appeared in English, rereads the history of Western political philosophy through the question of social predation.¹⁸ Its guiding thesis is that every relation of domination is contingent upon a relation of predation: "Domination presupposes a kind of manhunt."¹⁹ Predation has been necessary not only for the installation of relations of domination, but also to shore up their continual reproduction. With this starting point, Chamayou puts forward a philosophical and historical morphology of predatory or "cynegetic" power, a history of the manhunt written from the point of view of the prey.

The term "manhunt" should not be understood metaphorically. The history in question is that of real processes through which people were hunted down, captured, driven out, and killed through predatory forms of domination. The French verb *chasser* includes two valences: to hunt down, but also to chase out or expel. That said, the two are often found combined, as in the case of outlaws, where an act of banishment withdrawing the protection of the law provides the legitimating occasion to track and kill such subjects with impunity.

Predatory violence is neither arbitrary nor historically invariant, but always reliant on specific techniques of expulsion, capture and violence. Every manhunt is accompanied by a "theory of its prey", which serves to institute a division between those groups deserving of protection and those whom it is legitimate to hunt.²⁰ For example, the ancient world is marked by three distinct predatory schemas: acquisition hunts, cynegetic sovereignty, and pastoral power.

Of an economic rather than a properly political nature, the acquisitive arts of slave capture described by Plato formed the material condition of possibility for this "genuine slave society," as Moses Finley dubbed it.²¹ Ancient Greek slave hunts founded their legitimacy upon a supposedly ontological relation between natural masters and those born for servitude, a relation it nonetheless found itself compelled to reinforce through rituals of "ontological policing," as witnessed in the annual purges of Helots in Sparta.²²

The biblical tradition presents two modes of rule, polarized against one another. On the one hand, a tyrannical form of terrestrial sovereignty established by violent coercion, linked to the figure of the hunter-king Nimrod, who disobeyed God and recaptured his children in order to found his State. To this illegitimate monarchy is opposed an ecclesiastical rule of the shepherd associated with the father of faith, Abraham, who lovingly cares for each individualized member of his flock in accord with God's rule. This spiritual, transcendently obedient, pastoral regime of shepherd governmentality was analyzed by Foucault in *Security, Territory, Population*, but without its antagonistic counterpart ever being clearly unfolded: an image of monarchical sovereignty as an impersonal and callous tyranny founded immanently on the conquest and robbery of men by force.²³

Despite presenting itself as a form of rule based on persuasion rather than on coercive capture, pastoral governmentality nonetheless mobilizes a right to kill founded on cynegetic modalities: heretics, deemed to be 'diseased' individuals circulating 'counterfeit' truths, are banished from the flock by force. Cast out into the wild, the protection of the law withdrawn, they may be slaughtered at will under the sign of the wolf, the natural enemy of man.

At this point we may take note of a convergence between the pastoral cynegetic purges of heretics and an early usage of archival power: "The great task of the Inquisition consisted in identifying heretical individuals. This involved unprecedented activities of surveillance and control, a whole archival apparatus. This was again the case, at the threshold of modernity, with the great witch hunts."²⁴ This link between incipient apparatuses of control and a cynegetic power directed against heretics therefore serves as a distant historical predecessor for the recombination of these apparatuses in today's war on terror. For, as Chamayou has recently noted elsewhere, in the latter we again find an archival analytic power placed in the service of a murderous violence directed against 'potentially dangerous' individuals rather than classical armies or nations.²⁵

At the same time, regrettably little attention is ultimately paid to the specificity of the phenomena of witch hunting. While Chamayou's focus is primarily on heresy, as Silvia Federici has noted, there is a crucial difference between the treatment of heresy and its progressive replacement by the persecution of witchcraft in the 16th and 17th centuries. The difference concerns the gendered nature of witch hunts:

The witch-hunt was ... a war against women [...] [I]t was a concerted attempt to degrade them, demonize them, and destroy their social power. Witch-hunting in Europe was an attack on women's resistance to the spread of capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction, and their ability to heal. Witch hunting was also instrumental to the construction of a new patriarchal order where women's bodies, their labor, their sexual and reproductive powers were placed under the control of the state and transformed into economic resources.²⁶

Federici's analysis of the central role played by the witch hunts, and in particular their importance in effectuating a redistribution of the productive and reproductive spheres that would come to define the sexual division of labor in capitalist society, can therefore be usefully read alongside *Manhunts*, as it deepens the link between the anti-heretical pastoral hunts and the "hunting of the poor" Chamayou links with Marx's category of primitive accumulation.²⁷

Human predation undergoes an unprecedented expansion with the development of transatlantic capitalism. The chapters that follow describe seven distinct syntheses that these techniques of predation assume in modernity, visible in phenomena such as slave hunts, mob lynching, and anti-immigrant attacks, among others. These analyses provide the occasion for spirited polemics against a number of ideological forms that still claim an unfortunately large number of adherents today, including paternalism, protectionism, and xenophobia, to name a few.

It is clear that the current war on terror obeys the logic of a manhunt. What is not always clear is the extent to which cynegetic warfare differs from conventional warfare.

First, there is the question of *who* comes to be identified as the enemy. The contemporary proscription of the terrorist inherits a set of discursive traits that can be traced back to the colonization of the "New World" in the early 16th century, at which time a synthesis of previously distinct cynegetic forms took place.

During the subjugation and genocide of the indigenous people of South America under Charles V, the question arose as to how to legitimate a war of extermination against 'barbarians' on universalist Christian grounds. The Aristotelian doctrine of the natural slave presented a problem for the official religious narrative of a unified and equal humanity. At the same time, this new international context meant that the doctrines of proscription that the church had at its disposal needed to be adapted to suit a transatlantic context.

Until the 16th century, the model for international proscription was the pirate, who Cicero famously claimed is "not included in the number of the lawful enemies, but is the common enemy of all": an unjust opponent who does not warrant recognition as an equal, with whom it is impossible to negotiate, and who therefore commands no duties or responsibilities on our part.²⁸ In the proscription of the pirate we therefore find the image of a universal prey.

At this point a synthesis occurs between the slave hunt and the pastoral hunt of extermination, producing a new schema of conquest merging the notion of a "global prey" with that of a war against "proscribed nations":

This imperialist discourse was based on a theory of ontological disfiguration of indigenous populations: because their customs were clearly at odds with the image of God, who 'made man in his own image,' they could no longer be regarded as sovereign nations. 'Deface the image, and you divest the right,' as Francis Bacon summed things up [...] The ontological disfiguration of the enemy, his exclusion from the face of mankind, justified waging a war of extreme violence against him - war that took the form of a hunt. With this theorization of imperialist conquest, one thus went from hunting down banished individuals to waging war in the form of a hunt against proscribed nations.²⁹

It is this early model of international cynegetic war that will be adapted over time to suit different forms of prey. Today's cynegetic war no longer targets a nation or a people but rather an "outlaw regime" and its leaders. Outlaws of this sort are to be combatted no longer through a form of total war, but a war waged on individuals captured or targeted one at a time.³⁰

Not only the enemies, but the tactics of the manhunt differ dramatically from those of classical war. Unlike the conventional warfare analyzed by Clausewitz, which takes the form of a *duel* between two mutually recognized enemies both of which expose themselves to death, the manhunt involves a radical asymmetry of forces, in which the hunter sets out in pursuit of a disadvantaged target, and avoids any exposure to death through the use of intermediaries such as dogs or robots. The cynegetic ideal of a "non-

confrontation with death, of domination without real combat," leads to a rejection of all former conventions of military combat and the recourse to the sorts of non-noble means typically reserved for police work.³¹ The result is what Chamayou dubs a "cynegetic burlesque," a conflict between "the baseness of the means deployed and the height of the style with which they are adorned."³²

Modern drone warfare inherits this logic, providing a unilateral safe distance that preserves the life of the hunter through the use of auxiliaries. The burlesque effect of the current U.S. drone killings strip them of any pretense of heroism, leaving the assassins incapable of winning the hearts and minds of the people, effectively allowing heroism and martyrdom to "become the exclusive privilege of the enemy."³³

With drone warfare a new coupling of datapower and predatory power is also announced. Archival techniques are again called upon to identify and locate a prey. Additionally, the preventative and securitarian logic that marked the paradigm of Fichte's police is today coupled with cynegetic extermination hunts, giving rise to a "pre-emptive manhunt" that "found[s] the irrevocable - death - on the probable."³⁴ This merger of securitarian technologies of capture with the brutality of predatory violence figures among the most troubling horizons of our time, and it is against it that we must direct our critical aggression.

While the Fichtean dream of a totalizing power of traceability may aim to do away with the cynegetic figure of the police detective, destined to be replaced by the infrastructural automata of dataveillance, hunting power continues to be reborn again and again in new forms. However, with any luck, it will continue to be accompanied by a perpetual rebirth of rebel figures such as the forger, the pirate, and the outlaw-hacker, who will greet the Fichtean hunters of tomorrow with the same ferocious laughter that Hegel showered upon them in his own time.

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Notes

- 1.** Grégoire Chamayou is a researcher with the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) at the École normale supérieure de Lyon. All translations of his work are my own, unless otherwise marked.
- 2.** Grégoire Chamayou, "History and Philosophy of Traceability," Max-Planck-Institut site, accessed January 27, 2013, [**http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptII_ChamayouGregoire-Traceability**](http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptII_ChamayouGregoire-Traceability).
- 3.** Project description, Max Planck Institut site, accessed January 27, 2013, [**http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptII_ChamayouGregoire-MachinesOfMemory**](http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/projects/DeptII_ChamayouGregoire-MachinesOfMemory).
- 4.** Grégoire Chamayou, "Every Move Will Be Recorded - A Machinic Police Utopia in the Eighteenth Century," Max-Planck-Institut site, accessed January 27, 2013, [**http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/news/features/feature14**](http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/en/news/features/feature14).
- 5.** Ibid.
- 6.** The term comes from Richard Clarke. For the use of this term, see Chamayou's account in "Fichte's Passport," where he describes it as "a watchfulness exercised by the recording of data preserved for a future use."
- 7.** Chamayou, Grégoire, *Les corps vils, Expérimenter sur les êtres humains aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2008).
- 8.** Chamayou, *Les Corps*, 15.
- 9.** Chamayou *Les Corps*, 15.
- 10.** Chamayou, *Les Corps*, 12.
- 11.** Plato, *Sophist*, 219a.
- 12.** Chamayou, *Les Corps*, 16.
- 13.** *Les Corps*, 17. English readers may note that the French term *avilissement* is linked to verb *avilir* [to debase] and the adjective *vil* [vile], from which the book's title is taken. For Marcel's usage of the term, see his *Les Hommes contre l'humain*, (Paris: Fayard, 1968).
- 14.** Chamayou, *Les Corps*, 23.
- 15.** Chamayou, *Les Corps*, 387.

16. Chamayou, *Les Corps*, 387.

17. Chamayou, *Les Corps*, 388.

18. Chamayou, Grégoire, *Manhunts: a Philosophical History*, trans. S. Rendall, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Originally published as *Les chasses à l'homme - Histoire et philosophie du pouvoir cynégétique* (Paris: La fabrique-Éditions, 2010).

19. Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 4.

20. Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 2.

21. See Finley, Moses, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1998).

22. Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 10.

23. The "conceptual personae" of Nimrod envelops a vast legacy of historical uses and appropriations of which *Manhunts* only gives us glimmers. Several footnotes indicate this widespread extent of its lineage, which figures prominently in polemics during the English civil war, in social contract theory, as well as in the critique of monarchical conquest.

24. Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 22.

25. See Chamayou, Grégoire, "The Manhunt Doctrine", trans. S. Lillis, in *Radical Philosophy* 169 (Sept/Oct 2011): "In the new doctrine of militarized manhunting, the goal is 'to detect, deter, disrupt, detain, or destroy networks before they can harm innocents'. It is a matter of preventative security campaigns founded on a logic of elimination of dangerous individuals."

26. Federici, Silvia, *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), p. 186, 170.

27. See *Manhunts*, Ch. 7, "Hunting the Poor". Federici makes the link quite explicit: "Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies, which were thus 'liberated' from any impediment preventing them to function as machines for the production of labor. For the threat of the stake erected more formidable barriers around women's bodies than were ever erected by the fencing off of the commons." *Caliban*, p. 184.

28. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.4. An English translation appears in *On Duties*, ed. and trans. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.3. For an extended meditation on this category of legal proscription, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All - Piracy and the Law of Nations*, (New York: Zone Books, 2009).

29. Chamayou, Grégoire, "The Enemy As Prey", trans. A. Goldhammer, *Villa Voice*, February 2, 2011. Accessed January 27, 2013, <http://archivevillavoice.net/2011/02/02/the-enemy-as-prey-exclusive-essay-by-gregoire-chamayou/#more-1460>. For an extended analysis of this text by Bacon, see *Manhunts*, Ch.4

30. Ibid.

31. Chamayou, "The Enemy as Prey."

32. Chamayou, *Manhunts*, 73.

33. Chamayou, "The Manhunt Doctrine."

34. Ibid.

Additional Information

ISSN	1092-311X
Print ISSN	2572-6633
Launched on MUSE	2013-06-11
Open Access	No