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From the Material Turn to the Emergence of Algorithmic Geopolitics – Virginie Mamadouh (Geopolitical Trends in the 21st Century)

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exploringgeopolitics.org/from-the-material-turn-to-the-emergence-of-algorithmic-geopolitics-virginie-

Leonhardt van Efferink, Leonhardt van Efferink, Leonhardt van Efferink, Leonhardt van Efferink2019 (December)

Introducing Virginie Mamadouh

Dr Virginie Mamadouh is Associate Professor in Political and Cultural Geography at the University of Amsterdam.



Her research interests include geopolitics and globalisation; transnationalism and 'new media'; (transnational) migration and territorial identities; electoral geography and urban social movements.

As an appetizer, a key observation in "From the Material Turn to the Emergence of Algorithmic Geopolitics":

“In the age of algorithm, when we hardly grasp the consequences of the algorithms we have created so far, AI presents a dangerous litmus test of geographical imaginations and geopolitical representations are encoded for machine use.”

Dr Leonhardt van Efferink founded ExploringGeopolitics in 2009. Since then, the website has published over 200 contributions by more than 130 scholars. To celebrate its 10-year anniversary, ExploringGeopolitics has invited its contributors to reflect on geopolitical trends in the 21 century. Two questions play a central role. What was the main trend in the 2010s? And what will be the most important trend in the 2020s?

[Click here for all contributions and the contact details of this contributor](#)

The material (re-)turn of the 2010s

The 2010s has been the decade of the return of geopolitics to the material world. In political and media debate it might even seem a return to classical geopolitics, with bestseller as *The Revenge of Geography* (Kaplan 2012), *Prisoners of Geography* (Marshall 2015) or more recently *Origins: How the earth made us* (Dartnell 2019).

In academic geography (more articles than books) this was definitively no return to the material determinism of the traditional geopolitical approaches of those trying to distill foreign policy cues from physical geographical features (location, climate, relief, access to the sea...): There were reactions to the focus on representations of the previous

decades. Following the plea of feminist geographies to take the embodied experience of geopolitics seriously, as well as the popularity of more than representational approaches and the more than human geographies and actor network theory.

Recent geopolitical studies have foregrounded non-human actants (horses, cows, dogs, pathogens....) as well as the materiality of the habitat of human kind : the volume (over the two dimensional map) including the underground, the built environment and the sky, seas, the smelting ice and the outer space (think of *Feminist Geopolitics* (Dixon 2015), *Vertical* (Graham 2016) or *Territory Beyond Terra* (Peters, Steinberg& Stratford 2018). However it was. The ongoing climate change has made way to *Anthropocene Geopolitics* (Dalby 2020) a topical issue and its geographies remain to be analyzed in details.

Geopolitics and Artificial intelligence

Among the upcoming trend and big question mark is the way artificial intelligence affect geopolitics. we have seen how internet and the social media have changed electoral geographies, politics and society in general (see *Data Revolution* (Kitchin 2014), *Algorithmic Life* (Amoore and Piotukh 2016), *Digital Geographies* (Ash et al 2018), *How to run a city like Amazon, and other fables* (Graham et al 2019)). We still know relatively little how they impact geopolitics in general and more specifically on geographical imaginations and geopolitical representations.

The infrastructure needed for the internet of things (G5 etc) is a new geopolitical stake, big data are new resources to be captured, new nodes and routes need to be secured, machine learning creates new global production networks (see *La cyberdéfense* (Cattaruzza et al 2018) and *Géopolitique des Données Numériques* (Cattaruzza 2019)). Artificial Intelligence (AI) will continue to change warfare (as drones already have) and to deepen the divide between high tech and low tech war wagers.

Finally an even more dazzling prospect is the fact that Artificial Intelligence will produce and circulate new geopolitical discourses. In the age of algorithm, when we hardly grasp the consequences of the algorithms we have created so far, AI presents a dangerous litmus test of geographical imaginations and geopolitical representations are encoded for machine use. More than ever: the principle "garbage in, garbage out:" is a potent warning against the dramatic outcome of this emerging algorithmic geopolitics.