Somathorybics: The Governance of Bodies as Noise

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Abstract: *This article introduces somathorybics as a framework for analyzing how institutions govern embodied presence once bodies are treated as noise rather than communicative media. It identifies four operators of sensory governance: 1) filtration constrains permissible presence and access; 2) compression renders embodied variation administratively actionable; 3) amplification scales vigilance through spectacle and smart systems; and 4) leakage names the everyday return of embodied interference through protest, micro-tactics, writing, and aesthetic indirection. The framework offers a portable vocabulary for describing sensory governance as infrastructural management of bodily legibility, not only discursive control, especially in authoritarian contexts where perception becomes a routine technology. Iran's compulsory modesty regime provides the article's concentrated case and demonstrates how law, culture, surveillance, and everyday enforcement transform women's bodily presence into a perceived form of sensory disorder. In the Iranian case, somathorybics foregrounds the management of embodied legibility, beyond the repression of speech.*

Keywords: *somathorybics, sensory governance, somaesthetics, noise, biopolitics, Iran, hijab*

Introduction

Communication traditions have long positioned embodiment and performance as central to how meaning takes shape, yet they have paid less attention to institutional practices of sensory governance. States and other institutions mark certain bodies as "noise" and govern perception itself by deciding what counts as visible, touchable, olfactory, movable, and vocal. Once institutions classify particular bodies as disorderly noise, governance becomes somatic and prescribes how bodies should appear, smell, move, and be felt in public. This shift recasts noise as political interference and spotlights power's ability to reorganize perception, interactional bandwidth, and affect. Here the signal becomes noise. What once counted as communication is reclassified as interference, and the work of governance moves into the senses.

I call this cross-sensory management of embodied interference *somathorybics*, the governance of bodies as noise. The term combines the Greek for "body" (sôma, σώμα) and "noise" (thórybos, θόρυβος), and it describes how the modesty regime maintains order at the level of bodies. It subsequently contributes to our understanding of how authoritarian regimes maintain order through forms of biopolitical governance and discipline of everyday life. As Heidi Kosonen (2020) observes, biopower and taboo function as regulatory systems that manage "risks and dangers to society," and can even "generate this threat… by their suppression of living and dying" (Kosonen 2020, 48, 60). Somathorybics subsequently marks the practices through which societies govern bodily noises perceived as threats through processes of normalization, categorization, as well as the staging of spectacle, a process that is always incomplete.

This essay specifies four operators of somathorybics. Initially, *filtration* marks a narrowing of sensorimotor capacity. Second, *compression* describes categorical flattening, in which heterogeneous practices are reduced to binary bins like proper vs. improper, and acceptable vs. unacceptable. Third, *amplification* highlights how vigilance is publicized and modeled: peers are enlisted and spectacle is staged (announcements, signage, and cases) to demonstrate the limits of what is allowed. Lastly, *leakage* names the everyday reappearance of interference, through micro-tactics of gaze, scent, color, touch, stride, and collective voice. Together, these elements shape everyday life in Iran, as in many societies, as one of smooth flows of disciplined bodies, with the occasional, undisciplinable eruption.

Iran's modesty regime provides a focused case through which to theorize somathorybics. From 1979 onward, an integrated apparatus of institutional laws, codes, and public pedagogy has construed feminine embodiment as interference to be governed via dress, comportment, proxemics, olfaction, gait, and voice. This article positions Iran as a concentrated case of sensory governance, a mode of maintaining order that classifies certain embodied displays as interference and then builds institutional routines to diminish, standardize, and publicize that interference. This exemplifies biopolitical governance at the level of conduct and everyday existence (Richards 2024, 3). Through an analysis of publicly accessible laws, human-rights reports, and scholarship, this study argues that when the body is governed as noise, perceptual filters are put in place to narrow perception and normalize self-monitoring, and how bodies nonetheless jam the signal by staging interference.

Theorizing Somathorybics

Somathorybics designates a modality of power that does not function merely through the censorship of speech or the regulation of overt messages. Instead, it shows how institutions govern bodies once bodily presence is interpreted as interference. When appearance, voice, movement, or sensorial expression is judged as disruptive noise, governance targets the sensorium itself. Recent somaesthetic–anthropological work frames this governance as the social organization of attention, how "meanings and values become felt qualities in the everyday use of (our) bodies" (Howes and Watson 2025, 5).

The conceptual foundation for this argument emerges at the intersection of two major traditions. On one side, somaesthetics understands the body as the ground of perception, since "the senses belong to and are conditioned by the soma" (Shusterman 1999, 302). It also treats the body as a locus of "meliorative cultivation" through disciplined bodily self-care (Shusterman 2008, 1). On the other side, noise and sonic studies treat "noise" as a political category shaped within war, media infrastructures, and sensory control (Goodman 2010, 6, 34). These studies also frame noise as a moral category grounded in "negative judgement" that authorizes routine regulation of what is classified as unwanted or inconsiderate sound (Thompson 2017, 4). Together, these literatures point to how the state's regulation of noisy bodies plays a crucial role in maintaining political control.

The governance of bodily presence can be analyzed as a question of perceptual conditions rather than message control. In this view, institutions configure the sensorimotor norms through which bodies are made publicly intelligible and socially legitimate. A key set of terms to analyze such processes comes from somaesthetics, which approaches bodily experience as a domain of inquiry as well as cultivation. Shusterman presents the project as simultaneously analytic and practical: "Somaesthetics can be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body" (Shusterman 1999, 302). Later, he stresses that

somaesthetic experience is materially rooted in bodily sensing and orientation, observing that "The somaesthetic senses are often divided into exteroceptive… proprioceptive… and visceral or interoceptive" (Shusterman 2008, 2). On this foundation, somathorybics treats sensorimotor conditions as objects of governance. It focuses on an institutional terrain where perceptual conditioning and bodily legibility are organized ahead of explicit meaning.

An essential turning point in this lineage is that somaesthetic cultivation is never beyond power. Shusterman's engagement with Michel Foucault emphasizes how bodily training can seem innocently "improving" while operating as political discipline; he writes that "'docile bodies' were systematically shaped by seemingly innocent body disciplines to advance certain socio-political agendas" (Shusterman 2000, 538). This insight is directly relevant to somathorybics. Governance does not have to prohibit specific statements. It can instead normalize perception, limit expressive range, and induce bodily compliance through embodied routines and institutional standards. Somaesthetics therefore provides a way to grasp how regimes of legitimacy emerge at the level of posture, gesture, comportment, as well as bodily presence, exactly the domain where bodies can be re-coded as "noise" rather than recognized and treated as communicative agencies.

Noise studies and soundscape scholarship, in turn, offer the political rationale that turns "noise" into a tool of governance. Jacques Attali's political economy of music positions noise as a force bound up with violence and control. He writes, "Noise is a weapon and music, primordially, is the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon" (Attali 1985, 24). This formulation enables somathorybics to approach noise not as simple nuisance, but as a socially actionable designation that authorizes intervention. If music can historically function as the "domestication" of noise, then bodily governance can likewise operate as the domestication of embodied intensity, transforming disruptive bodies into acceptable forms via discipline, containment, and correction. R. Murray Schafer highlights the perceptual and normative aspect of this process by framing noise as the product of trained exclusion: "Noises are the sounds we have learned to ignore" (Schafer 1977, 4). This matters within a somaesthetic frame because bodily noise is not purely acoustic. It also includes culturally regulated bodily sonorities and their everyday legibility (Tarvainen 2019, 13). These claims provide an essential bridge for somathorybics. Noise is not a neutral description but a learned category through which perception is dismissed. In bodily terms, embodiment itself can be governed by teaching publics and institutions to read certain somatic presences, appearances, movements, sounds, or spatial occupations, as disturbances to be ignored, suppressed, or eliminated.

Bodily-noise governance can be understood as a process of normative classification. What becomes administrable is not measurable volume of sound. It is the moral judgment that renders a presence excessive or improper. Marie Thompson makes this shift explicit by arguing that noise judgment is rooted in affect and morality rather than acoustic properties alone. She argues that noise is formed through evaluative classification. Thompson writes, "A subject-oriented definition frames noise as a negative judgement of sound" (Thompson 2017, 4). She also emphasizes that "noise is both the subject of this book and its methodological strategy" (Thompson 2017, 4). On this account, noise governance operates as the regulation of what is treated as disruptive, contaminating, or out of place. Read alongside somathorybics, Thompson's formulation clarifies why institutions discipline bodies not primarily because they "lack meaning," but because embodied expressivity is rendered an illegitimate intensity that must be corrected, suppressed, or as I describe it, filtered.

To theorize the governance of bodily noise with precision, it is necessary to foreground voice and orality as domains where embodied remainder is made governable. Mladen Dolar provides a precise conceptual tool by characterizing voice as the material support of meaning

that nonetheless remains excessive to meaning. He writes that "the voice is the material support of bringing about meaning, yet it does not contribute to it itself." He distills this point into a succinct methodological proposition, stating that "the voice… is what does not contribute to making sense" (Dolar 2006, 15). This is the kind of threshold phenomenon somathorybics brings into view. Bodies are governed not just at the level of speech content, but through the embodied textures that spill beyond semantic control. Accordingly, institutions permit voice as long as it appears as a transparent conduit for intelligibility, yet they routinely intervene when voice becomes audible as body (timbre, accent, loudness, breath, trembling, and stutter), since the material remainder of voice can be construed as disturbance instead of meaning. Steven Connor pushes the discussion past the conceptual by assembling a rich, detailed archive of non-lexical vocal events like hums, sobs, and stutters, where bodily expressivity is rendered vulnerable to correction as well as shame. His depiction of sobbing as a break in speech illustrates how vocal materiality becomes governable: "The sob is at once a mangling of speech by inarticulate crying" (Connor 2014, 58). Furthermore, recent scholarship on somaesthetics and voice also widens the object beyond "speech" to bodily sound in general. Shusterman includes "laughing, screaming, coughing, sneezing, hissing, moaning, shouting and whistling," as well as "unwanted bodily sounds in our everyday lives" (Shusterman 2012c, 27, as quoted in Tarvainen 2019, 13).

Oral materiality (i.e., breath, spit, wheeze, and pant) further concretizes this politics by showing how interior bodily life is translated into public exposure. Brandon LaBelle's mouth-centered analysis gives a vocabulary for analyzing how vocal embodiment is policed as improper noise. Describing the sonic corporeality of sound poetry, he notes, "It wheezes, it spits, it moans and pants" (LaBelle 2014, 66). These descriptions are not simply aesthetic. They signal the governance problem somathorybics identifies. Bodily vocality becomes actionable as disturbance when institutions confer legitimacy on disembodied rationality and treat oral materiality as excessive or contaminating. In this sense, the mouth becomes one of the most politically vulnerable sites of bodily-noise governance because it publicly exposes the body's living materiality.

Bodily-noise governance involves more than regulating messages, it also organizes perception itself, it shapes how environments condition what becomes sensible, tolerable, and socially processable. For somathorybics, this way of organizing perception highlights a contemporary understanding of governance as increasingly infrastructural. Bodies are governed through environmental and systemic arrangements that surveil, categorize, and intervene in embodied intensity. The governance aspect is made even more apparent in scholarship that conceptualizes perception itself as a sphere of control. Steve Goodman's theorization of sonic power supplies a vocabulary to understand governance as sensory conditioning: "Media technologies discipline, mutate, and preempt the affective sensorium" (Goodman 2010, 34). This line directly supports somathorybics by recasting regulation as environmental and pre-discursive. Instead of simply banning speech, institutions can regulate perception, shape mood, intensify vigilance, and secure compliance through affective conditioning. Goodman further locates this process within infrastructures that connect organisms and systems, observing "a symbiosis of noise, bodies, and machines" (Goodman 2010, 6).

Noise classifications are better understood as epistemically made rather than neutral phenomena. They are not simply discovered in nature but generated via conceptual frameworks and trained listening practices. When institutions label bodily expression as noise, they regulate a regime of perception, authorizing some presences as meaningful while dismissing others as disturbance. Nina Sun Eidsheim states this bluntly and decisively: "how we think about sound matters" (Eidsheim 2015, 3). She reinforces the claim that noise classifications can function to

diminish or silence particular voices and bodies. Such as view, also grounds somathorybics as governance of the sensorium, not merely of discourse.

Bodily-noise governance can also be read through design logics. Technological paradigms structure bodily attention and legitimacy by prioritizing what can be disciplined. Concurrently, contemporary work in somaesthetic design shows that governance increasingly functions through technological paradigms that organize bodily attention and legitimacy. Höök and colleagues identify a profound absence within "embodied" design. They argue that "the actual corporeal, pulsating, live, felt body has been notably absent from both theory and practical design work" (Höök et al. 2015, 27). This critique has been echoed in disability design scholarship arguing that mainstream design often assumes a "standard body" and marginalizes difference through dis-ablism, in part because commercial design is market-oriented and organized around a "profitable standard" (Das and Ventura 2025, 94, 97).

The governance of bodily-noise can be amplified by interfaces and institutional technologies that convert bodily difference into deviation, and therefore, into an actionable target for correction. In this sense, cultivation is politically ambivalent rather than automatically emancipatory. Bodily experience can be cultivated for flourishing, but it can also be cultivated through regimes that establish and police bodily legitimacy. A. Tarvainen's integration of somaesthetics with music and voice confirms the compatibility and coherence of these claims, stressing cultivation as a defining somaesthetic principle: "One of the main ideas of somaesthetics is that bodily experience can be cultivated" (Tarvainen 2019, 8). Somathorybics takes this principle further by foregrounding the political stakes of cultivation. Bodily experience is not merely cultivated for flourishing; it is also governed through regimes that define and police bodily legitimacy.

Taken as a whole, these literatures provide the conceptual basis for somathorybics as a theoretical contribution by converging on a common claim: governance can function through perceptual conditioning and the management of embodied legibility. Somaesthetics legitimizes the body as cultivated perception and indicates how bodily discipline can be organized toward socio-political agendas. Noise and soundscape scholarship treat disturbance as a political and moral category formed through trained perception and enforcement. Voice and mouth scholarship demonstrates how embodied vocal remainder becomes governable precisely as it escapes semantic containment. Sonic warfare and vibrational listening locate governance in the affective sensorium and at the level of the epistemic making of sound itself. Somaesthetic design carries this trajectory by showing how institutional-technological systems confer bodily legitimacy through standards and interfaces oriented toward regularized variables, often at the expense of felt embodiment. Across these traditions, however, what remains under-developed is a single framework that specifies the institutional operators by which bodies are governed as noise across multiple nonverbal channels. Somathorybics fills this gap by defining governance not as a singular prohibition but as the four operators, filtration, compression, etc. in my schema, that restructure the sensorium and make bodily legitimacy actionable.

Somathorybics in Practice

This analysis suggests that a state can move beyond censoring speech. When bodily presence is read as interference, governance is routinized through habitual operators that reconfigure public perception and redefine what can be seen, heard, sensed, and safely performed in public. In Iran's modesty regime, "order" seeks to intervene in the body's perceptual legibility: what the body looks like, how it sounds, how it moves, how close it can be, and how it may appear in public.

To make the mechanism easy to follow, this section sets out the four previously-mentioned operators, and works through them as recurring ways institutions govern bodily noise. These operators do not refer to a single actor or a single episode of enforcement. They recur as administrative and cultural practices that fix a perceptual model of proper presence. Departures from that template become actionable grounds for warnings, reporting, and, eventually, punishment. Human Rights Watch's (2024) account bears out this logic, noting that the law "consolidates many measures already in place… and imposes additional severe penalties."

The evidence base comes from publicly available texts and documentation, including the Center for Human Rights in Iran's English translation of the Law to Support the Family Through Promotion of the Culture of Chastity and Hijab (2024), also from human-rights reporting on enforcement practices and institutional harms, and interpretive support from historical and academic accounts of post-revolutionary gender politics, women's protest, and cultural production. For the purposes of this analysis, the focus is on how the governing mechanism works, not a comprehensive account of social history.

Finally, the cultural field, including cinema, performance, music, visual art, and publishing matters in this sense because, by virtue of its circulation and repetition, it serves as a shared rehearsal space, continually training and habituating perception to standards of what counts as legitimate embodiment. The law itself positions arts and media as a central arena of governance, it explicitly identifies the "production and broadcasting of films and television series" as means to promote "Islamic lifestyle" and "chastity and hijab" (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, articles 8 and 9). On these grounds, arts are included not as an extra topic, but as a focal space where filtration, compression, and amplification are brought into view, and where aesthetic workaround takes form as leakage.

Filtration

Filtration is the operator by which acceptable presence gets pared down. It operates by tightening the spectrum of bodily forms that can show up without sanction, and marks improper embodiment as grounds for removal or corrective action. From a surveillance perspective, this is best understood as an access technology, since classifications function as "invisible doors that permit access to or exclude from participation" (Lyon 2003, 13). In practice, this filtration installs a threshold logic of participation, as Guidance Patrols "aim mainly to bar improperly veiled women from entering public spaces" (Akbari 2019, 6). This extends from parks and shopping centers to metro and bus stations, universities, government offices, cafés and restaurants, and cultural venues like cinemas or concerts, so entry depends on passing a bodily checkpoint.

In accounts of biometric bordering, the mechanism is cast as filtration, whose "ultimate aim" is "the filtering of presumably useful from non-useful border crossers" (Amoore 2006, 344). Within the built environment, filtration is anchored in exclusionary ownership logics: "property rights are necessarily exclusive," permitting the possessor "to exclude unwanted people from access" (Mitchell 2003, 19). The same access logic is further substantiated by UN expert reporting, which states that authorities "deny [women] access to public institutions, including hospitals, schools, government offices and airports, if they do not cover their hair" (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2023).

Beyond access points, filtration also governs bodily appearance. It targets contour, movement, and exposure. *Minimizing visible contour* limits what can be read as bodily shape. Denunciations of "hair, curves, and bare skin" set concealment as the perceptual benchmark (Abdmolaei 2019, 117), and scrutiny includes "the length and fit of… sleeves, trousers and uniforms" (Amnesty

International 2024). *Limiting movement expressivity* similarly positions dress as a constraint on women's "bodily mobility" and as a disciplinary mechanism "intended to regulate women's movements and limit their access to public spaces" (Abdmolaei 2019, 21, 89). *Regulating hair and skin exposure* operates as a visibility threshold that marks the outer limits of what may register as publicly legible in the first place (Abdmolaei 2019, 21, 89, 117). In Islamic legal-ethical terms, this threshold is commonly mapped via the concept of awra, the designation of bodily zones that must be concealed, with specifications that vary across traditions and contexts (Boulanouar 2006). The point here is less doctrinal adjudication than institutional translation, how modesty vocabularies are made enforceable standards of public legibility.

In combination, these elements drive home that filtration is not only a dress rule, it is an access rule, one that works its way through domains of social life and not just clothing (Akbari 2019, 6; Parsa 2022, 87). When voice itself is gated (i.e., what venues may host women singers, what audiences may hear them, and what platforms may carry their sound), collective participation ends up contingent on passing a sensory checkpoint. Filtration thus works as a cross-domain eligibility test, governing who can enter, perform, work, and circulate in public space without being read as a disruptive presence.

The mechanism carries over to sound, where rules regulate when women's voices are permitted to be publicly heard as voice. Even as some constraints have softened, the state has "maintained its archaic ban on solo female vocals," redirecting women's singing into choirs, women-only venues, or online circulation rather than mixed audience performance (Siamdoust 2023, 578; Nooshin 2018). Practically, women vocalists are channeled into constrained formats. One singer reported, "I am… only allowed to work if I perform with a man," and described the difficulty of staging even women-only solo concerts (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2018). Enforcement can also be punitive. Singer Hiwa Seyfizade was reportedly arrested during a live performance after an official cited "unauthorised solo singing," alongside other detentions and account closures linked to women's performances (Amnesty International 2025).

Filtration is not only spatial. Beyond parks, malls, and metro gates, and beyond regulating clothing as a dress code, it reaches into employability and bureaucratic legitimacy by making "proper" appearance a condition for recognition as a legitimate professional, worker, or client of the state. The instruction to "dress with dignity and avoid appearing cheap or exposed in offices" captures the workplace as a conditional entry site, with the office effectively operating as a perceptual checkpoint (Sanasarian 1982, 126). The same logic appears in routine form. Women are "obliged to wear the Islamic hijab… including in workplaces," and documenting how compliance can shape access and standing, ranging from chador requirements for female lawyers (and guards denying entry) to workplace penalties and employer bans on women's make-up (Human Rights Watch 2017, 47–48).

Mobility is subject to filtration, so traversing the city becomes a sequence of potential checkpoints, stops and diversions. Testimonies document metro entrances where officials "do not allow you to enter," avoidance strategies such as staying off public transport to reduce encounters, and counter-measures including car impoundment and fines (Amnesty International 2024, 7). Mobility governance can take an infrastructural form, with "improper hijab… [being] captured on CCTV cameras on the roads," which effectively places the checkpoint inside circulation itself (Akbari 2019, 7). Transit is further reorganized through gendered mobility infrastructure, including "women-only buses and taxis" (Shahrokni 2020, 3), while the same eligibility logic carries into institutional gates and service systems, from denial of entry to "around 200" women students at a university entrance for not wearing the hijab, and spillover into health systems via pharmacy shutdowns and directives which require "Islamic dress code" for patients as well as

medical staff (UN Fact-Finding Mission on Iran 2024, 8). The cumulative effect is procedural, as access to transit, education, travel, banking, and services is repeatedly conditioned through filtering encounters where visibility itself can call forth exclusion.

Even without an overt stoppage, filtration exerts probabilistic force by shaping spatial routes and producing anticipatory self-governance. People move through the city as though policing were patchy and spatially uneven, selecting routes, venues, and times, where scrutiny is less probable. In Iranian fashion market interviews, one participant reports "search[ing] for the right place and time (where and when the police forces are less likely to be present)" and learning "safe locations" where one can go "without worrying about facing the police" (Ghaffari et al. 2019, 438).

The same dynamic appears as "going around moral police patrols," with collective tactics to track patrol movements and avoid their presence (Akbari 2019, 10). Evidence shows that anticipation restructures micro-decisions in advance, from avoiding parking "in busy places" and preferring "online taxi services" to reducing harassment risk, to avoiding public transport altogether, "We prefer to use our cars rather than using public transport" in order to minimize recurring entry-point confrontations (Amnesty International 2024, 2, 7). Women are similarly portrayed as "search[ing] for… secluded and unpopulated areas" to avoid "the prying gaze… of guards on the lookout for transgressors" (Shahrokni 2020, 11). In somathorybic terms, this kind of surveillance amounts to filtration by anticipatory avoidance. Proxemics and urban choreography are recalibrated not merely by checkpoints themselves, but by the learned forecasts of where a noise classification is most likely to occur.

Collectively, these mechanisms clarify why filtration is best framed as cross domain gatekeeping. It operates at entry points through threshold gating, within appearance through contour, movement, and exposure, within sound through vocal audibility, within work through professional recognition, within services through denial and refusal, and within mobility through both stoppage and anticipatory routing. In each instance, the state does more than enforce a rule. It establishes the terms under which bodies can appear, move, and be heard as legitimate. Filtration consequently acts as a cross domain eligibility test that determines who can enter, work, perform, circulate, and travel, in public space without being cast as a disruptive presence.

Compression

Compression follows filtration. Once perception has been narrowed, governance aims to make what remains rapidly sortable and actionable. What is at stake is a project of legibility that converts complex lived differences into administratively useful facts that can be processed and compared. Those comparisons often rely on standardizing heterogeneous appearances into a continuum so cases can be ranked, matched to a rule, and handled with minimal deliberation (Scott 1998, 80-81). This underlying move is as commensuration, where qualitative differences are converted into comparable quantities that can move through bureaucratic procedures (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 316). The consequences are not simply descriptive, because "classifications and standards give advantage or they give suffering" (Bowker and Star 1999, 6). At the enforcement interface, compression is maintained through routine decision devices that simplify clients and situations under constraint, so that the frontline practice of the lowest level administrator effectively becomes policy in action (Lipsky 2010, xii–xiii).

Enforcement in the case of Iran reveals compression most sharply through the catch-all category of "improper hijab," a category flexible enough to consolidate many sensory details

into one actionable label. The regime and policing discourse often gloss this as "bad hijab" (Persian: *bad-hejabi*), a broad designation for perceived "improper veiling" under compulsory hijab rules. This is why the definition remains unstable. The regime does not apply a stable or uniform meaning of "bad hijab," and assessments can pivot on granular cues like clothing color or tightness, or whether trousers are tucked into boots, so heterogeneous appearances are routinely compressed into a single enforcement category (Justice for Iran 2014, 3).

The compressive logic is evident in the way "bad hijab" is operationalized through an enumerative checklist of visible particulars such as hair showing, make-up, uncovered arms or legs, "thin and see-through" or tight clothing, and garments marked by "foreign" signs, so that multiple micro variations can be compressed into one sanctionable label (Pakpour 2015, 77). This legal-administrative definition also resonates with historical documentation of postrevolutionary regulation and ethnographic emphasis on everyday moral police enforcement and the extension of proper veiling into comportment and voice (Paidar 1995; Khosravi 2008). Somathorybically, the mechanism works by turning perceptual variation into a quick administrative decision, illustrated by the report's account of Mahsa Amini being detained on allegations of "improper hijab" and taken to the Vozara detention center to be "educated" about hijab restrictions (Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law 2025, 6).

The same logic works rhetorically by pushing dissent into moral extremes, so complex motives register legible only as a punishable "type." Women protesting compulsory veiling were branded with delegitimating sexualized labels, "naked women," "whores," and "American agents," compressing plural political claims into a single immoral category (Sanasarian 1982, 125). Contemporary documentation echoes the same moralizing compression through the language of chastity, noting threats of acid attacks and disfigurement as a tactic used to terrorize women considered "unchaste," a term that collapses a range of public behaviors into one stigmatized moral designation (Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law 2025, 19).

The 2024 chastity-and-hijab law formalizes compression by translating broad appearance categories into countable occurrences with a standardized escalation ladder. Under Article 48, after identity verification through police "smart platforms" and databases, the first instance fine is suspended but "will be notified… using smart platforms, SMS or the mail," with higher penalties triggered by repetition across subsequent instances, thereby turning embodied variation into an administratively tracked series of occurrences (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 34).

In parallel, a reporting app workflow requires users to choose the "type of violation" including "improper hijab" or "removal of hijab," after which the app generates a real time text message to the registered vehicle owner, which makes compression a literal decision tree that converts perception into a standardized output (Independent International Fact Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran 2024, 13).

Compression also yields aesthetic templates. After the field is narrowed to proper versus improper, "proper" hardens into a recognizable look that is readily governed. Enforcement can hinge on fine-grained style markers like clothing color, tightness, and even boots while the official label stays broad and variable, so the category is reproduced via shifting style judgments instead of a stable definition. The judgment of entertainment agent is accepted as sufficient evidence. This is how broadness gets stabilized in practice. It is translated into discrete, legible labels like "no head covering" and "inappropriate dress," which then serve as standardized inputs for escalation. Compression recodes sensory nuance into administrable categories, and those categories return to everyday perception as common sense templates for identifying deviation.

Amplification

Amplification scales vigilance so that enforcement becomes an atmosphere, a felt quality that exceeds any single object or agent, "a quality which does not belong to them in their own right" (Anderson 2009, 79). It makes boundaries visible and widens vigilance by distributing surveillance across perception and social relations. Signage "emphasises the existence of surveillance and thereby amplifies its effect" (Cole 2004, 432), and lateral surveillance draws peers into monitoring so that "all are simultaneously urged to become spies" (Andrejevic 2005, 479). Media circulation, when repeated, stabilizes boundary cues by turning them into familiar scenes. Given that "spectacle itself is becoming one of the organizing principles of the economy, polity, society, and everyday life" (Kellner 2005, 58), warnings, recording, deputization, and exemplary cases operate less as isolated events and more as an ambient, continuous signal of risk.

One of the main amplification mechanisms is *distributed witnessing*. Article 36 of the 2024 law explicitly calls on public participation: "Citizens can report acts of unveiling, improper dress, or obscene clothing…" through a designated system (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 26). This is amplification by design. Enforcement is no longer confined to police encounters but made ambient by the possibility that anyone can become a reporting node, a shift in which "surveillance responsibilities are being distributed to the public" (Reeves 2012, 240).

Documentation optics increasingly drives this operator, with photographing and recording functioning not only to punish but to teach watchability. Official statements indicate women deemed improperly veiled "would be photographed and filmed and handed over to the judiciary" (Justice for Iran 2014, 42). The recording act does more than capture evidence. It teaches the public that bodies are legible data and that classification can pursue you beyond the street, echoing the logic of "transforming the body into pure information" (Haggerty and Ericson 2000, 613).

By prioritizing smart systems, the law intensifies amplification through *automating detection and escalation*. Article 48 outlines a move toward "introducing smart platforms and systems… and using modern technology" to support identification and warning (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 35). In somathorybic terms, amplification works by widening the sensing apparatus and converting perception into scalable infrastructure, consistent with the finding that "the proliferation of automatic alert systems makes it possible to systematically surveil an unprecedentedly large number of people" (Brayne 2017, 978).

Deterrence is also scaled through exemplary sanctions that extend beyond the punished person, including penalties, work restrictions, educational and professional consequences, and the public circulation of cases. Even when penalties are applied unevenly, their visibility and constant mention amplify the perceived boundary. The rationale is stated directly in the claim that "forms of public shaming and humiliation … are valued … precisely because of their unambiguously punitive character" (Garland 2001, 9).

Early post-revolutionary contention also reveals amplification through *counter spectacle and rumor*. A large counter-demonstration recasts protesters as enemies, while rumors identified women on the other side as wives of former SAVAK officials, the Shah's pre-1979 secret police and intelligence agency, widely associated with surveillance and political repression, (Sanasarian 1982, 126). Here amplification takes the form of narrative infrastructure. Interpretation is policed alongside garments, and the dynamic aligns with panic dynamics where a key distortion is "exaggerating grossly the seriousness of the events and the numbers involved" (Cohen 2011, 26).

A further mechanism is *cultural policy saturation*, which repeatedly circulates the perceptual template via high bandwidth media. Threats are framed in explicitly cultural media terms in the 2024 law, which names Hollywood, home theater networks, cyberspace, satellite channels, and computer games as vectors of influence (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 6). This is amplification through image circulation at scale, matching the claim that "the spectacle is not merely the apparatus of media, but the relations between individuals themselves, as mediated by the stream of images…" (Debord 2021, 17). Somathorybics names this shift: enforcement becomes an atmosphere, where bodies are governed not only by rules and agents but by scalable perceptual infrastructures that make vigilance feel continuous.

Leakage

Leakage refers to how interference tactically reappears, as bodies re-thicken perception under constraint. The term is not meant to romanticize resistance. It is also not a claim that all modesty practice is oppressive. Instead, it functions as a neutral mechanism category for how controlled systems generate everyday micro-variations, workarounds, and occasional eruptions that exceed the intended filter (Scott 1990, 199). Through the lens of epistemic disobedience, leakage becomes a struggle over what counts as public knowledge of the body, marking moments when embodied practice, testimony, and aesthetic form refuse the regime's authorized templates for what can be seen, said, or believed (Mignolo 2009, 159–160; Rancière 2004, 12). In this sense, leakage involves practices that make perceptible what dominant interpretive frames obscure and practices that build shared, cooperative capacities to insist on alternative intelligibilities, not simply individual acts of defiance (Fricker 2007, 162; Medina 2013, 26).

Everyday micro tactics across senses also generate this effect, as small adjustments thicken agency without necessarily taking the form of overt defiance. Somathorybic micro-tactics include glance choreography, time-shifted fragrance, chromatic seams and texture accents, widened stride under crowd concealment, cooperative haptics in crowds, and choral voicing that diffuses individual timbre into collective sound. The aim here is not romanticization but recognition. These acts are ordinary byproducts of a perceptual regime that induces continuous self-management where power is organized so that it "should be visible and unverifiable" (Foucault 1977, 110).

Writing and cultural voice can operate as leakage by restoring presence where visibility is constrained. The logic is expressed in the statement that "Writing… could be considered no less a transgression than unveiling" (Milani 1992, 6). Here leakage not limited to bodily display can include the reappearance of voice, authorship, and public address as embodied stakes, particularly where excluded groups must "invent and circulate counterdiscourses" and "formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1990, 67).

A key boundary condition for somathorybics is that the veil is not merely a compliance object but also a communicative medium with multiple meanings. Veiling can function as a communicative practice whose meanings shift with context, and in some settings it can become "a vehicle for resistance" (El Guindi 1999, 13). This matters for analytic neutrality. Somathorybics tracks governance operators instead of fixing a single moral meaning of covering, and this fits the broader claim that "dress is a situated bodily practice … embedded within social relations" (Entwistle 2000, 17).

Artists often emerge as specialists in leakage because art is built on *indirection, coding, and rerouting*. In cinema, leakage is frequently achieved through stylistic workaround, including

lighting, staging, framing, allegory, offscreen implication, and controlled sound. The example of strategic concealment, unveiling "masked by a lighting scheme that strategically covers…" (Naficy 2012, 124), demonstrates the ambivalence of leakage, which simultaneously operates as constraint compliance while keeping bodily presence partially available. This dynamic can be situated within the broader politics of indirect expression under domination, where a "hidden transcript" serves as a "critique of power" spoken "behind the back of the dominant" (Scott, 1990, xii).

Sound is another channel of leakage. Although rules of modesty forbid women from singing publicly, these prohibitions do not fully hold. Moments still occur when a woman's singing voice "breaks through" the barrier (Naficy 2012, 476). The voice here is bodily remainder, audible presence that exceeds permitted categories and cannot be fully compressed, which recalls the affective exposure that can accompany vocal emergence, where "an affect of shame… accompanies voice" (Dolar 2006, 90).

Finally, leakage often forces recalibration, as new tactics invite new countermeasures, which revise the filter. The procedural design of the 2024 law, including identification systems, warnings, and escalating steps (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024, 35), suggests institutional anticipation of leakage, and a feedback-ready apparatus built to absorb, classify, and respond to recurring reappearances of interference. This adaptive logic reflects the control-society premise that "you never finish anything" (Deleuze 1992, 65), because governance operates via continuous adaptation instead of reaching a settled endpoint.

Closing Synthesis

Across the case materials, the four operators work as a cycle rather than a sequence. They repeatedly somathorybify public space by converting embodied variation into governable noise and by making self-monitoring routine. Somathorybics reads official categories as instruments of rule and tracks alternative knowledges of presence that persist under constraint. Filtration sets the terms of appearance by deciding who may appear, where, and in what form. Compression makes embodiment actionable by sorting variation into proper and improper templates and by recoding dissent as a case. Amplification scales deterrence through recordings, witnesses, and circulation that normalize boundaries as common sense. Leakage returns interference through protest, counter-spectacle, and micro-tactics in writing and performance. Leakage does not end the apparatus. It forces recalibration and the cycle restarts under revised thresholds.

By specifying somathorybics as the process that makes bodies governable as noise, its main contribution is a transportable vocabulary for sensory governance that lets communication theory describe bodily legibility as something managed through infrastructure, not just through discourse. Institutions can govern the body as an object of perception and administration, but they cannot govern "the soma" as lived experience, which persists as a site of excess and return. Although this article treats Iran as a concentrated case, versions of this system have emerged, and can emerge, across very different political settings, whenever institutions treat embodied presence as an interference problem to be managed. The operator set generalizes to other arenas where bodies are treated as noise to be filtered, compressed, amplified, and managed, including schools and workplaces, cultural and media industries, clinical and therapeutic regimes, and platform moderation systems where perception itself becomes a political technology.

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