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Endless Lists: Racialization, Divisions, Abandonment, Seclusion

Keywords

racialization, division, abandonment, isolation, necropolitical afterlives, necro-lives

Abstract

The article delves into the enduring ramifications of historical and contemporary processes of racialization, the delineation of societal divisions, the forsaking of marginalized communities, and the coerced isolation or seclusion of specific populations. Within the realm of necropolitical afterlives, these terms indicate the manners in which these persistent predicaments have molded and persist in molding the realms of life and death for diverse groups. Analysis encompassing necro-lives holds significance in comprehending the sway of necropolitics, unearthing systemic injustices, and amplifying the voices silenced. The bodies of necro-lives amalgamate in communal endeavors for justice, parity, and human rights. Necro-lives call for mobilization and advocacy to deconstruct necropolitical frameworks and forge more just and impartial societies. Necropolitics, entailing dominion over life and death by influential necro-entities, can be contextualized through these themes, spotlighting how certain populations endure violence, disregard, or isolation beyond their corporeal existence, thereby perpetuating cycles of injustice and suffering.

Neskončni seznam: rasizacija, delitve, zapuščenost, osamitev

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Ključne besede

rasizacija, delitev, zapuščenost, osamitev, nekropolitična post-življenje, nekro-življenje

Povzetek

Članek obravnava trajne posledice zgodovinskih in sodobnih procesov rasizacije, razmejitve družbenih delitev, zapuščanja marginaliziranih skupnosti in prisilne izolacije ali osa-

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mitve določenih populacij. Ti izrazi na področju nekropolitičnih post-življenj nakazujejo načine, ki so vztrajno oblikovali in še vedno oblikujejo področja življenja in smrti različnih skupin. Analiza, ki zajema nekropolitiko, je pomembna za razumevanje vplivov nekropolitike, odkrivanje sistemskih krivic in krepitev utišanih glasov. Nekro-telesa se združujejo v skupnih prizadevanjih za pravičnost, enakopravnost in človekove pravice. Nekro-življenja pozivajo k mobilizaciji in zagovorništvu za dekonstrukcijo nekropolitičnih okvirov ter oblikovanje bolj pravičnih in nepristranskih družb. Nekropolitiko, ki temelji na nadvladi nekro-entitet nad življenjem in smrtjo, lahko kontekstualiziramo z omenjenimi temami in poudarimo, kako določen del prebivalstva vzdržuje nasilje, ravnodušnost ali izolacijo onkraj svojega telesnega obstoja, s tem pa ohranja cikle nepravčnosti in trpljenja.



Introduction

This article addresses the ongoing effects of historical and contemporary processes of racialization, segregation of society, exclusion of marginalized communities, and enforced isolation or seclusion of certain populations. Analyzing necro-lives is important for understanding the impact of necropolitics, exposing systemic injustices, and making voices heard that have been silenced. Rearticulating necropolitical frameworks involving the domination of life and death by influential necro-entities can be addressed through these themes. In doing so, it becomes clear how the idea of the racialized body can be brought to the forefront of contemporary philosophical debates to address “the deeply sensitive, heavily affective spaces that people must navigate” and things that “come from a time that is not of our making, [but] they’re jumping out at us in this time, seeping into our everyday experiences.”¹ Or, as Macarena Gómez-Barris would put it, it’s “about finding connections and learning from them about how we can support and promote a different ethos based on more joyful and non-hierarchical relationships and more complex ways of knowing the world.”²

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¹ Nomusa Makhubu, “Other Knowledge, First Move: A Conversation with Nomusa Makhubu,” conversation by Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek, in *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies*, ed. Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2023), 22.

² Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Other Knowledge, Second Move: A Conversation with Macarena Gómez-Barris,” conversation by Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek, in Gržinić and

The Concept of Race Is a Horror to Philosophy

Race and racism are, as Mbembe says, “part of the fundamental process of the unconscious. In that respect they relate to the impasses of human desires—to appetites, affects, passions, fears.”³ The idea of race is, and as both post- and decolonial theories have shown us, the fundamental “disease of the (colonial) head.”⁴ Wherever it appears, even if only to talk about it, the concept of race “unleashes impassioned dynamics and provokes an irrational exuberance that always tests the limits of the very system of reason.”⁵

Race today—as it is often said, we live in post-racial times—has become only seemingly conceptually unthinkable. Ann Laura Stoler suggests that part of the problem lies in “colonial aphasia,”⁶ a term Stoler uses to refer to the loss of access to and active dissociation from the problem of colonialism, a difficulty in speaking and in generating a vocabulary that links appropriate words and concepts to appropriate things. The “system or body of thought” is constantly inventing ways to epistemologically immunize itself against the “effects of Blackness”⁷—race and racism are usually relegated to the realm of the unrepresentable, the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, in relation to philosophy.

Race and Blackness are two sides of a codified madness that the Euro-American world has produced;⁸ and it is a madness that the Euro-American world—in times of ontological and epistemological uncertainty—has to deal with. In his lectures “*Society Must Be Defended*,” Michel Foucault has already pointed out

Pristovšek, *Political Choreographies*, 247.

³ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 31.

⁴ Jovita Pristovšek in Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek, “Race and Its Far-Reaching Contemporary Ontological and Epistemological Implications,” in *Diseases of the Head: Essays on the Horrors of Speculative Philosophy*, ed. Matt Rosen (Earth, Milky Way: Punctum books, 2020), 216.

⁵ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 2.

⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France,” *Public Culture* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 121–56, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2010-018>.

⁷ Meg Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant,” *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 213–36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/431624>.

⁸ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 2.

how race is an extremely mobile concept,⁹ and in this sense race and racism “not only have a past. They also have a future, particularly in a context where the possibility of transforming life and creating mutant species no longer belongs to the realm of fiction.”¹⁰ The figure of the “Black,” however, as the *Critique of Black Reason* has shown us, was never codified merely as a figure of madness, as ontologically defective, as “man-object, man-merchandise, and man-currency,”¹¹ as a being with limited or no agency. Precisely because of the systematic negation, the denial of “humanity” and personhood, and the reservoir of nonsense and fantasies inscribed in this figure, thus constituting an “extraordinary accumulation of sensations,”¹² the colonized was also in a constant state of becoming: (an)other.

So, what would need to be reconsidered with regard to the so-called impasse of (White) thought, are the “effects of Blackness” itself. First, because what was once so meticulously elaborated—in Immanuel Kant’s “pre-”¹³ and “critical philosophy”—to serve as a “defense against horrors” or, in Mbembe’s words, against Black Reason, was precisely the idea of what should be called “Colonial Reason” with its “mindless state of mind,”¹⁴ or in line with Giorgio Agamben, with its state of exception that served to separate reason from the “body” and “flesh.”¹⁵ Today we can identify this “flesh” in numerous modes of existence as a status below the “threshold of the human,”¹⁶ below the level of “humanity,” while the “bodies” are “left to live,” abandoned, and so on. Mbembe suggests that the common trajectory of these modes of existence is the universalization

⁹ See Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the College de France, 1975–76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 56.

¹⁰ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 21.

¹¹ Mbembe, 11.

¹² Mbembe, 39.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, “Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764),” in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11–62.

¹⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 140.

¹⁵ On anthropogenesis, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Brian Carr, “At the Thresholds of the ‘Human’: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Replication of Imperial Memory,” *Cultural Critique* 39 (Spring 1998): 119–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354553>.

of the Black condition, as it most accurately summarizes the state of universal humanity in the present time.¹⁷

The “effects of Blackness,” once presented as a form of “disease” of the “Colonial Head,” are paradoxically beginning to acquire the status of an epistemological “cure” for contemporary “diseases of the head.” For as Mbembe’s *Critique of Black Reason* suggests, “Black Reason” appears as one of the key directions for future thought if Western, Eurocentric epistemology is to transcend the limits of its own “Colonial Reason.”

The figure of the “Black,” a racialized, colonized, ungendered, and dehumanized “racial ‘flesh,’”¹⁸ to borrow Brian Carr’s list of terms (and I would add, an almost peculiar being constructed as not quite subject not right object) is thus at the heart of all these processes. In light of today’s convergence of neoliberal global capitalism and the reinvention of animism, Mbembe’s lecture “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism” speaks to the “manufacturing of subjects as objects” and the “manufacturing of objects as subjects,” emphasizing the need to interrogate the modes by which objects are brought to “life” at a time when “living things” invariably fall into a deadly ritualized mechanics of life.¹⁹

Historically, Black Reason, as Mbembe suggests, is the result of colonialism, enslavement, and apartheid, and it refers to the paradigm of subjugation, to a model of extraction and plunder, and to the figure of knowledge and fantasies.²⁰ But what was once a condition of Atlantic colonialism is now, in neoliberal global capitalism, a universal condition of humanity itself.²¹ As Marina Gržinić notes in her reading of Mbembe’s *Critique of Black Reason*, Mbembe rearticulates Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “becoming” and proposes a universalization of the figure of “Black” as a figure below the level of humanity, as it most accurately

¹⁷ Achille Mbembe in Marina Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope, dekolonialnost in rasizem,” in *Politika, estetika in demokracija*, ed. Marina Gržinić (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2015), 108. Marina Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope, dekolonialnost in rasizem,” in *Politika, estetika in demokracija*, ed. Marina Gržinić (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2015), 108.

¹⁸ Carr, “Thresholds of the ‘Human,’” 125.

¹⁹ Achille Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism,” lecture at Barker Center, Harvard University, December 4, 2013, YouTube video, uploaded by Ozmund Field, December 13, 2013, 1:20:39, <https://youtu.be/MtBJ-M-cK4s>.

²⁰ Mbembe in Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope,” 114.

²¹ Mbembe in Gržinić, 115.

describes the condition of (universal) humanity in the contemporary system of neoliberal global capitalism.²² Race is a mechanism of reification, a security system, and a mode of governmentality—and above all, it is a raw material “from which difference and a *surplus*—a kind of life that can be wasted and spent without limit—are produced.”²³

It is with the concept of race as a “gray area” at the intersection of body and philosophy in times of tension between biopolitics and necropolitics that we can point to its contemporary ontological and epistemological implications and think about the future of the prosthetic body in the 21st century. For what is historically at this intersection is a racialized, colonized, genderless, and dehumanized racial flesh, a being constructed as not a proper subject and not a proper object. Let’s recall right away a series of terms listed by Mbembe that denote contemporary forms of existence that all coexist in the context of neoliberal, global finance capitalism: “human-thing,” “human-machine,” “humancode,” “human-in-flux.”²⁴

To put it succinctly, the present relations of inhumanity are rooted in the inhumanity of past centuries.²⁵ Anibal Quijano suggested that globalization can be seen precisely as “the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentred capitalism as a new global power.”²⁶ This power revolves around two fundamental axes: the social classification of the world’s population along racial lines and the new structure of control of labor and its sources and products.²⁷ All this was followed, as Quijano argues, by the constitution of Europe as a new entity/identity—the elaboration of a Eurocentric perspective of knowledge whose central elements is dualism, the radicalization of which can be seen, for example, in the Cartesian rupture between a rational subject and a body, which until then, in Christian thought, represented an unresolved ambivalence between the soul and the risen body.

²² Mbembe in Gržinić, 108.

²³ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 34.

²⁴ Mbembe, 3–4.

²⁵ Elaine Coburn, review of *Critique de la raison nègre*, by Achille Mbembe, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 177.

²⁶ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” trans. Michael Ennis, *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533.

²⁷ Quijano, 533–34.

The second step of the radicalization unfolded from the eighteenth century onwards as an evolutionism that formulated the emergence of “human” history as a continuous, linear progression from the “state of nature” to its culmination in European “civilization.”²⁸ A Eurocentric knowledge perspective has fabricated, codified and placed the “inhuman” in a specific place on the timeline—as prior to “*human* history” or more precisely, as “without history,” legitimizing infantilization, inferiority, exploitation and enslavement, while naming the “Black” as living proof of the inability to separate instinct and Reason/reason.²⁹

Eyal Weizman writes in 2016 that in the early Enlightenment, three limit conditions were related: “The threshold of the forest—a shifting environmental condition together with its unique climate; the threshold of the law—the political limit of territory and sovereignty; and the threshold of the human—a blurry limit to the human species”³⁰; these frontiers became and remain entangled in such a way that shifts within one lead to shifts in the others.³¹

Moreover, as Joseph Vogl has shown, neoliberal global finance capitalism has taken on a kind of aesthetic—sublime—character because it is floating (digital), intangible (it escapes control), unrepresentable (in sublime sums of money that cannot be captured by any sensible material), and, above all, because, through the transcendence of material production, it has acquired the creative capacity of self-creation, giving rise to a series of “zones of indistinctions,” or so-called “gray zones” in which political and economic decisions are made.³² All of this, as Vogl notes elsewhere, has powerful and fatal effects, “effects of sovereignty,”³³ storms of chaos that leave behind the ravaged landscapes of the present and the future already sold.

²⁸ Quijano, 534–42.

²⁹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 30.

³⁰ Eyal Weizman, “Are They Human?,” *E-flux*, Superhumanity, October 10, 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/68645/are-they-human/>.

³¹ Weizman, “Are They Human?”

³² Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, trans. Joachim Redner and Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

³³ Joseph Vogl, “The Sovereignty Effect: Markets and Power in the Economic Regime,” trans. William Callison, *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2014): 125–55, <https://doi.org/10.5250/quiparle.23.1.0125>.

Racialization and Migration

The refugee crisis that escalated in 2015 has sparked many debates, often fruitless, on both sides of the front, about who has a legitimate right to enter the European space of freedom of opportunity (which created the conditions for the crisis) and who does not (political migrant vs. economic migrant or refugee vs. migrant),³⁴ as if both had nothing to do with the European history of colonialism and the Holocaust. Nat Raha vividly shows how things are inextricably linked together:

The Global North does not exist in isolation—all the wealth of the Global North has been extracted, has accrued and accumulated through the extraction of labor resources, land and people from the so-called Global South. And that relation, the accumulation, I think Marxism is very powerful in thinking through all of that. All of those resources, all of that labor, all of that life that's been extracted is still there in some form as value. That's why the wealth inequality between the Global North and the Global South is so massive. Frantz Fanon claims that Europe is literally a creation of Africa.³⁵ There would be no Europe if it were not for enslaved Blacks, Africans, and to a much lesser extent, enslaved Brown, South Asian, and East Asian bodies who've been put to work in the service of capitalism and capitalist nation-states as Empire in the Global North.³⁶

However, the so-called refugee or humanitarian crisis and the situation of refugees in refugee centers, asylum shelters and temporary tent accommodations—i.e. in the zones that Europe creates within its space or on its periphery is based on the principle of getting rid of those who do not “belong” in the European order of relations, which takes the right to zone its exterior and transform

³⁴ In Slovenian context, the terminological “dilemmas” around the definitions of a political and economic migrant were discussed within Terminological counselling, an online service of Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language, ZRC SAZU, intended for the expert community public facing specific naming problems. See “Prebežnik” [a refugee], Terminološka svetovalnica, Inštitut za slovenski jezik Frana Ramovša ZRC SAZU, accessed January 21, 2023, <http://isjfr.zrc-sazu.si/sl/terminologisce/svetovanje/prebeznik>.

³⁵ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 102.

³⁶ Nat Raha, “Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures: A Conversation with Nat Raha,” conversation by Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler, in Gržinić and Pristovšek, *Political Choreographies*, 132.

it into landscapes of death through (neo-)colonial appropriation by means of military, political and economic interventions—is no longer a scandal today.³⁷

In his 2020 study “Carceral Geographies along the *Balkan Refugee Route*,”³⁸ an analysis that looks at three lineages of subjugated bodies: Roma, migrants, and refugees, Piro Rexhepi, notes that

Refugee crisis has not only become a revenue stream but also a momentary opportunity for the peripheral and post-socialist states to use their control and containment as a negotiating leverage with the EU. The impoverished peripheral subject who sees austerity as the mechanism of being robbed of their peripheral European privilege has now come to also see the refugees, Roma, women, queer and trans folks as a threat to their existence; regardless of what registry he locates, his “injury” is a racist call for promised European privilege that does not protest the police for beating and killing Roma and refugee communities but for not protecting whatever is left of that post-Cold War promise of privilege in a euro-gated community.³⁹

Rexhepi shows how the convergence of Covid-19 with the ongoing “refugee crisis” enabled the EU to revise its asylum policy, which has subsequently morphed into a “public-private carceral conglomerate.”⁴⁰ Turning away from Europe and its racist capitalist constellations therefore remains the most important anti-racist task facing the left today.⁴¹ Since the immediate future holds the plan-
etarization of apartheid, as Mbembe asserts,⁴² the future of thought should be in the direction of coming out of a relationship without the desire and from the danger of societies of enmity.⁴³

³⁷ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 60.

³⁸ Piro Rexhepi, “Jetnišnične geografije balkanske begunske poti,” in “Rasni kapitalizem: Interseksionalnost spolnosti, bojev in mejnih teles,” ed. Tjaša Kancler and Marina Gržinič, special issue, *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 48, no. 281 (2020): 80–92.

³⁹ Piro Rexhepi, “Carceral Geographies along the Balkan Refugee Route” (unpublished manuscript, 2020). This is the unpaginated English version of the article titled “Jetnišnične geografije.”

⁴⁰ Rexhepi, 81.

⁴¹ Rexhepi, 83.

⁴² Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 180.

⁴³ Mbembe, 188.

Since 2022, with the exception of a two-day headline like the border crisis between Poland/EU-Belarus border crisis,⁴⁴ suddenly no one was talking about migrants. Following the US theorist Fatima El-Tayeb,⁴⁵ who specifically analyses the European regimes of Whiteness, as well as Houria Bouteldja,⁴⁶ in 2020, Rexhepi exposes the abstract humanism of left progressivism across Europe, which routinely dismisses questions of coloniality and racism as liberal discourse to disguise its supposedly color-blind “class struggle” against austerity, as if the two things had nothing to do with each other.⁴⁷ At the same time, they are ostensibly anti-racist and anti-capitalist while supporting the EU, whose deadly security infrastructures in the Mediterranean and along the Balkan route are directed primarily against Black and Brown refugees.⁴⁸

Why is it important to emphasize all this? Because the exposed rhetoric of “we” against the elites has caused the left in Europe to literally lose its compass. Turning away from the processes of racialization, subjugation, differentiation, which are at the center of the Marxist explanation of the circulation of capital, the army of labor, private property, is nothing but drowning in empty rhetoric, which fits very well with the European rhetoric:

We must close the borders. Filter those who make it across them. Process them. Choose who we want to remain. Deport the rest. Sign contracts with corrupt elites from the countries of origin, third world countries, transition countries. They must be turned into the prison guards of the West, to whom the lucrative business of administering brutality can be subcontracted.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ In July 2021, a new refugee crisis erupted between Poland and Belarus, and to a lesser extent between Belarus and Lithuania or Latvia, where thousands of migrants were abused for a power play between the EU and actors outside the EU. See Ondřej Filipec, “Multilevel Analysis of the 2021 Poland-Belarus Border Crisis in the Context of Hybrid Threats,” *Central European Journal of Politics* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.24132/cejop_2022_1.

⁴⁵ Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

⁴⁶ Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love* (South Pasadena, California: Semiotext(e), 2016).

⁴⁷ Rexhepi, “Carceral Geographies.”

⁴⁸ Rexhepi.

⁴⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 98–99.

European provincialism with its Eurocentric thinking, which turns Europe into a provincial fortress, according to Gržinić, thus has its own (additional) emblematic figure for the “becoming Black of the world”⁵⁰: the refugees and asylum seekers.⁵¹ Her thesis implies a sharp critique of the aphasic, Western European system of thought that is unwilling to reconsider its own colonial past and the self-evident idea of freedom (along with its implementation).

Necrogeography

Liberal political thought, as Mbembe has argued with reference to Hagar Kotef, has always clung to contradictions when it came to the idea of a borderless world and freedom enshrined in the concept of movement, while at the same time it has always managed mobility through the use of concepts of race, class and gender, creating ever new forms of vulnerability for stigmatized and expendable racialized groups.⁵² With the war in Ukraine and the millions of refugees coming to the EU, the question of the status of refugees and of migration is exponentially present since 2022.

In his 2019 book *Necropolitics*, Mbembe speaks of necrogeography, where subjects (refugees, displaced, migrants, asylum seekers—the list of dispensable bodies is never exhausted) are trapped in a state between the life and death, and where the extraction of time,⁵³ as Ruth Wilson Gilmore would argue,⁵⁴ from foreclosed bodies occurs along with the extraction of land and natural resources. Mbembe talks about the spread of societies of sovereignty and techno-fascism around the world, along the rapidly proliferating net of necro-spaces.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*.

⁵¹ Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope,” 109.

⁵² Achille Mbembe, “The Idea of Borderless World,” lecture at Whitey Humanities Center, Yale University, Tanner Lectures on Human Values, March 28, 2018, YouTube video, uploaded by Yale University, April 2, 2018, 1:26:35, <https://youtu.be/NKm6HPCSXDY>.

⁵³ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

⁵⁴ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,” in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London: Verso, 2017), 225–40; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures: A Conversation with Ruth Wilson Gilmore,” conversation by Marina Gržinić and Tjaša Kancler, in Gržinić and Pristovšek, *Political Choreographies*, 218–38.

⁵⁵ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

This endless list does not stop referring to an ever-present reality, though often largely invisible, not to say all-too-familiar and in the end banal. The camp, it ought to be said, has not only become a structural feature of our globalized condition. It has ceased to scandalize. Better still, the camp is not just our present. It is our future: our solution for “keeping away what disturbs, for containing or rejecting all excess, whether it is human, organic matter or industrial waste.” In short, it is a form of government of the world.⁵⁶

The nation-state is always presented as a biopolitical mode of protecting and improving the course of life of the majoritarian nation, which today, in order to maintain the biopolitical, produces necro-landscapes everywhere.⁵⁷ Slovenia, for example, has necropolitics at its core with the Erased, which is the name for social and political elimination in the de- and re-territorialization of bodies at the time of the formation of the Slovenian sovereign nation-state (the erasure occurred in 1992, before the Srebrenica genocide in 1995).⁵⁸ Slovenian state is also one of the biggest violators of the rights of the Roma community in Europe, to name the Roma family Strojani, who was moved out of Ambrus in 2007 due to death threats and expulsion demands from compatriots “defending” their “personal autonomy,” which is nothing but a form of control. It has also managed to impoverish the working class (among the most notorious bankruptcies starting in the 1990s were the collapse of the Maribor Automobile Factory, known as TAM, and the steel giant Litostroj holding). More, Slovenia has also managed to create highly racialized labor markets (most clearly in the infrastructure and construction sectors, which involve the very migrant workers from the former Yugoslav states who come, so to speak, from the same labor pool it erased in 1992, and who are constantly subjected to state-supported exploitation with virtually no rights). Not to mention that Slovenian state has implemented the logic of “graduated citizenship”⁵⁹ with its two failed referendums on the Family Code (in 2012, 2015), depriving the LGBTQI+ community of their constitutional rights. And last but not least, in 2020, the Slovenian government introduced new amendments to the Aliens Act that restrict the human rights of foreign workers and their families, children, minors and refugees.

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⁵⁶ Mbembe, 60.

⁵⁷ Marina Gržinić, “Euro-Slovenian Necrocapitalism,” *Transversal* (webjournal), Transform, February 2008, <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0208/grzinic/en.html>.

⁵⁸ Gržinić.

⁵⁹ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

When right-wing political rhetoric speaks of the people and the nation, markers of differentiation such as class, race, and gender dissolve and become invisible. The process of class and gender differentiation, racialization, the distinction between citizens and non-citizens and the abandonment of minorities is, however, central to the constitution of the majority in the nation-state.

Speculative Realism

In “‘Afterwards’: Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History,”⁶⁰ Gržinić posits the following: if the main feature of biopolitics is pseudo-humanism, and if the biopolitical optical machine could be summarized by the phrase “more human than human”⁶¹—since “human” is not only the product constructed against the animal (speciesism), but also a figure that is not reducible to the human animal (racism)—then the necropolitical optical machine, along with post-humanism or the “necropolitical injunction of neoliberal global capitalism, is ‘still too human!’”⁶² That is, “the optical machine of necrocapitalism cannot view any class, race, and gender specificities of the post-human, as this would imply the return of the social antagonism at the heart of the (post)-human.”⁶³

My proposal is therefore to pursue this “still ‘too human, much too human’” agenda, the dream of overcoming the notion of “human,” precisely on the terrain of speculative realism. I will draw on the introduction to *Speculations V: Aesthetics in the 21st Century*, in which Ridvan Askin, Andreas Haegler, and Phillip Schweighauser survey the developments of debates in 21st century aesthetics.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Marina Gržinić, “‘Afterwards’: Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History,” in *Body between Materiality and Power: Essays in Visual Studies*, ed. Nasheli Jiménez del Val (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2016), 163–82. Gržinić’s analysis exposes today’s humanitarian refugee crisis within the European Union and Europe as “one of the hardest lessons to learn for Western academic vocabulary” (Gržinić, 164); and by substituting the biopolitical concept of the “body” with the necropolitical notion of “political flesh” (i.e., the status of bodies in refugee centers), this analysis proposes the latter as the actual matter for thought to think (Gržinić, 179–80).

⁶¹ Gržinić, 177.

⁶² Gržinić, 177.

⁶³ Gržinić, 177.

⁶⁴ Ridvan Askin, Andreas Hägler, and Philipp Schweighauser, “Introduction: Aesthetics after the Speculative Turn,” in *Speculations V: Aesthetics in the 21st Century*, ed. Ridvan Askin et al. (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2014), 6–38.

The authors focus on aesthetics especially after the speculative turn,⁶⁵ after the articulation of the so-called speculative realists, a faction within continental philosophy. The speculative realists claim that since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*⁶⁶—that is, with Kant's introduction of a separation between the noumenal, the world as it is “in itself,” and the phenomenal, the world as it shows itself “for/to us”—continental philosophy has forgotten to think “reality” or has ceased to engage in such thinking. These accusations are, as Goran Vranešević picturesquely describes, the result of current “doubts about a subjectively totalized world, which with its limitations, like a flat world, prevents expeditions into the vastness of the world. More precisely, it is about the regions of existence that seemed to be lost forever, having been replaced first by the inaccessible world beyond [or the great beyond] and then by the further twisting of subjective finality.”⁶⁷

It is particularly interesting that contemporary debates on aesthetics, as argued in the abovementioned introduction, bring to the fore the internal split of speculative realist philosophy into two poles, a split that was already announced after the first wave of enthusiasm for the speculative turn had subsided.⁶⁸ Askin, Hägler and Schweighauser compare this internal split in speculative realism to the 18th-century debates over taste between rationalists and empiricists.

This discourse on taste, the authors argue, is particularly attractive to thinkers of the empiricist pole of speculative realism (the other is thus called rationalist),⁶⁹ since it provides an approach to things as they are in their reality, while

⁶⁵ The notion of the “speculative turn” is linked to the conference entitled “Speculative Realism,” which took place in April 2007 at Goldsmiths, University of London, and with the contributions of Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, and Quentin Meillassoux. See, for example, Rick Dolphijn, review of *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*, by Peter Gratton, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews: An Electronic Journal*, March 29, 2016, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/speculative-realism-problems-and-prospects/>.

⁶⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ Goran Vranešević, “Prihajajoči svet in žalovanje za njim,” *Časopis za kritiko znanosti, domišljijo in novo antropologijo* 39, no. 248 (2012): 76. All translations of Vranešević's article are my own.

⁶⁸ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, “Aesthetics after the Speculative Turn,” 29.

⁶⁹ British reflections on taste dealt with notions such as intuition, sensation, perception, and so on; Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser mention the forerunners of Alexander Gottlieb

allowing for the possibility of their “dehumanization” (note the positivation of a term that historically denotes the process of de-humanization) insofar as they relate to the structure of reality as such, and not just to the realm of human faculty of judgment.⁷⁰ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser thus explain a series of attempts to extend aesthetic thinking to a non-human world: the attempts of Steven Shaviro and Tim Morton dealing with Kant’s notion of taste, since his judgments of taste are not determined by concepts and are disinterested; the attempts of Graham Harman and Morton dealing with object-oriented aesthetics as manifested in the theory of “allure,” which refers to an object being able to taste, sense, feel, and perceive another object; Iain Hamilton Grant’s attempt at aesthetics, which refers to the intuition of the forces and potencies of nature; and Shaviro’s cosmology, which describes the realm of apprehension, the realm of relationality itself.⁷¹ For all these authors of the empirical half of speculative realism, every encounter is always already a site of aesthetic experience; and for all of them, aesthetics is distinct from conceptual knowledge, while at the same time it is a precursor to it.⁷²

“Given the expansion of aesthetics into the non-human realm,” Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser state, “this is also the moment when aesthetics is pushed from the domain of human epistemology into that of general ontology. Ceasing to be a particular kind of human relation to the world, it becomes a general descriptor of relationality of/in the world.”⁷³ Further, “in this framework, human epistemology only builds on and comes after the general aesthetic structure of/in being. Indeed, ‘subjectless experience’ underlies and comes to determine cognising subjects.”⁷⁴

However, while the empiricist pole of speculative realism argues for “subjectless experience,” the rationalist pole argues for “experience-less subjects.”⁷⁵ In their critique of the empiricist pole, Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser argue, ration-

Baumgarten’s aesthetics as a science of sensuous cognition: Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Anthony Ashley Cooper, and Francis Hutcheson.

⁷⁰ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 30–31.

⁷¹ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 31.

⁷² Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 31.

⁷³ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 31.

⁷⁴ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 32.

⁷⁵ Ray Brassier, quoted in Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 30.

alists disagree about the reification of aesthetic experience and about “human” terms (such as intuition, perception, etc.) used when speaking of “non-human relations” and objects; rationalists thus see a problem in confusing “human” and “non-human” relations and preventing “the rational investigation of human and non-human relations.”⁷⁶ For them, epistemology governs and determines aesthetics.

In locating possible objections to empiricist speculative realism—and before that with a reference to the “father” of the term “aesthetics,” Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (legitimizing and justifying Baumgarten’s position within rationalist thought)—Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser further recall a problem they see as common to both poles of speculative realism: the emergence of transcendental philosophy.

Kant’s invention of the transcendental intervenes precisely in the discussion between rationalists and empiricists—and even more, the speculative realists with their condemnation of correlationism, the latter arguing that it is impossible to discuss the issues of subjectivity independently of objectivity and vice versa, refer precisely to transcendental philosophy.⁷⁷ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser therefore argue that what we are witnessing on the terrain of the debates of the speculative realists is precisely the transformation of the concept of the transcendental.⁷⁸

For all speculative realists, since Kant’s invention of the transcendental, retain the notion of immanence; and all speculative realists have in common that they care about “this world” while they work out their “thisworldly” philosophies!⁷⁹ Moreover, Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser argue that the commonality of all speculative realists is the rejection of Kant’s Copernican Revolution and thus the centrality of human experience and its conditions of possibility, but in two different ways: while the empiricist pole rejects the “human” in “*human* experience,” the other side rejects “experience” as such.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 32.

⁷⁷ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 32.

⁷⁸ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 33.

⁷⁹ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 33.

⁸⁰ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 33.

On the one side, what results is an *ontological* recasting of the transcendental as it applies to reality per se: a transcendental empiricism (Grant, Harman, Morton, Shaviro); on the other side, we have an *epistemological* account of the powers of human thought to pierce this very same reality: a transcendental rationalism (Brassier, Meillassoux).⁸¹

In view of what we have said before about the idea of race, we might say that a criticism similar to that which the speculative realists addressed to continental philosophy can now be made of the philosophy of speculative realism itself. But my criticism here is far from defending Kant's system of thought. As we have seen, Kant is the best friend of both poles of speculative realism (but not also their enemy, as Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser have argued),⁸² whose "speculative register for the unification of the world"⁸³ has extended the horizon of the world to other realities to such an extent that it now "accepts all possible and impossible objects [. . .] introduced from outside"⁸⁴ and thus falls into a trap of "(contingent) choice: whether the world or object or subject or . . . it is always directly embodied as an object."⁸⁵ Sometimes we also have to deal with the resurrected dead or with specters.

In rejecting the centrality of human experience and its conditions of possibility, both poles avoid thinking the "racial flesh" that historically, ontologically and epistemologically, stood "at the threshold of the human"⁸⁶ and that should be addressed in its many contemporary forms. If one group of speculative realists explicitly rejects the "human" in human experience, and the other rejects "experience" as such, then it is clear that both poles are "aphasic" with respect to the idea of the human itself, that is, the human as a concept elaborated through the ongoing processes of racialization.

In 1997, at a ten-day Cerisy-la Salle conference in France, entitled "L'Animal autobiographique" (The Autobiographical Animal), Jacques Derrida described the logic of the anthropological machine with the following words:

⁸¹ Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 33.

⁸² Askin, Hägler, and Schweighauser, 33.

⁸³ Vranešević, "Prihajajoči svet," 81.

⁸⁴ Vranešević, 81.

⁸⁵ Vranešević, 81.

⁸⁶ I refer here to the aforementioned title of Carr's "At the Thresholds of the 'Human.'"

As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. And in these moments of nakedness, under the gaze of the animal, everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse, *I am (following) the apocalypse itself* that is to say the ultimate and first event of the end, the unveiling and the verdict. I am (following) it, the apocalypse, I identify with it by running behind it, after it, after its whole zoo-logy. When the instant of extreme passion passes, and I find peace again, then I can relax and speak of the beasts of the Apocalypse, visit them in the museum, see them in a painting [. . .]; I can visit them at the zoo, read about them in the Bible, or speak about them as in a book.⁸⁷

Derrida speaks of the dominance of a category of discourses, of “texts signed by people who have no doubt seen, observed, analyzed, reflected on the animal, but who have never been seen by the animal,”⁸⁸ and who have never considered the experience of the contemplating animal in the philosophical and theoretical architecture of their discourse. He speaks of a group of thinkers (among whom he counts René Descartes, Kant, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas) who see, without having been “seen naked by someone who, from the basis of a life called animal, and not only by means of the gaze, would have obliged them to recognize, at the moment of address, that this was their affair, their lookout [*que cela les regardait*].”⁸⁹ And he speaks of a “symptom of this disavowal”⁹⁰ that we should decipher. He speaks of the inability to speak, the muteness, and the “aphasic inability or stupefaction that prevents the use of words.”⁹¹ “Perhaps the body of the anthropophorous animal (the body of the slave) is [indeed] the unresolved remnant that idealism leaves as an inheritance to thought, and the aporias of the philosophy of our time coincide with the apo-

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⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 381–82, <https://doi.org/10.1086/449046>.

⁸⁸ Derrida, 382.

⁸⁹ Derrida, 383.

⁹⁰ Derrida, 383.

⁹¹ Derrida, 388.

rias of this body that is irreducibly drawn and divided between animality and humanity.”⁹²

To put in on the table: in 1997 Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze brilliantly elaborated on the “color” of Kant’s Reason/reason,⁹³ to which we can add that Reason/reason is neither “genderless” nor “classless.” Kant—the philosopher of the system—as Eze stated, “had uncritically assumed that the particularity of European existence is *the* empirical as well as ideal model of humanity, of *universal* humanity,”⁹⁴ “taken as humanity *in itself*,”⁹⁵ which, in its greatest perfection, seems to (allegedly) reside within the White race.

It would be a mistake to believe that Kant contributed nothing new or of original consequence to the study of “race” or to the problem of European ethnocentrism in general. Strictly speaking, Kant’s anthropology and geography offer the strongest, if not the only, sufficiently articulated *theoretical philosophical* justification of the superior/inferior classification of “races of men” of any European writer up to his time.⁹⁶

With this rough outline of the symptoms of contemporary ontological and epistemological uncertainty within the “system of thought,” we can now address the state of affairs in necrocapitalism by making a direct analogy to what Mbembe describes as the reinvention of animism.

In a lecture entitled “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism,” Mbembe’s central thesis is that late capitalism as we know it today represents a kind of final stage of commodification characterized by the convergence of capitalism and the reinvention of animism.⁹⁷ The concept of animism, introduced into anthropology in the late nineteenth century by Edward Burnett Tylor, ascribes to “primitive societies,” in a way that infantilizes their beliefs—the belief that there is life in

⁹² Agamben, *The Open*, 12.

⁹³ Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, “The Color of Reason: The Idea of ‘Race’ in Kant’s Anthropology,” in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 103–40.

⁹⁴ Eze, 117.

⁹⁵ Eze, 117.

⁹⁶ Eze, 129.

⁹⁷ Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.”

inanimate matter, that inert objects have a life that can be activated and animated—as they “seem” to represent a kind of precursor in the evolution from religion to science.⁹⁸ In Mbembe’s view, this reinvention of animism works in two directions in the context of contemporary neoliberal global necrocapitalism.

The first direction, as Mbembe elaborates it, refers to the “manufacturing of objects as subjects,” to the granting of the form of life in particular to new technological objects and more generally to commodities or to finance capital itself. On the one hand, this direction implies a kind of re-enactment of commodity fetishism; on the other hand, it also refers to the life in the object itself, that is, to the life imposed on the objects by the preceding violent, politically animated human production, visible in the wars for the monopolies on the mineral resources used for the production of new technological objects.⁹⁹

And here we are back to the second direction of animism, which is closely interwoven with the first. It refers to the “manufacturing of subjects as objects,” which turns out to be a perverse form of subjectification through thinghood, since objects now function as virtual transformations of ourselves in relation to them.¹⁰⁰ According to Mbembe, commodity fetishism has reached the stage where objects possess their own life, which, it seems, is the only one worthy of the name, and our task, therefore, is to become animistic objects in order to grasp the life that now resides and is animated between the object and the object, in the realm of this “other humanity” or “in-humanity.”¹⁰¹

Are we able, then, to think in terms of the necropolitical afterlives, precisely these very terms that point to the ways in which persistent predicaments have shaped and continue to shape the realms of life and death for various groups?

⁹⁸ Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.” See also Achille Mbembe, “Technologies of Happiness in the Age of Animism,” lecture at European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, Switzerland and Valetta, Malta, March 27, 2016, YouTube video, uploaded by European Graduate School Video Lectures, September 12, 2016, 1:04:59, <https://youtu.be/nIi-jTCn8Gh4>.

⁹⁹ Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope,” 121. See also John E. Drabinski, “Mbembe, Democracy, Animism,” academic website, December 6, 2013, <https://jdrabinski.wordpress.com/2013/12/06/mbembe-democracy-animism/>; Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.”

¹⁰⁰ Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.” See also Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope,” 121.

¹⁰¹ Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.”

Coda

The bestowal of life on the objects themselves has serious consequences for life as such and its effects: in another lecture titled “Rethinking Democracy Beyond the Human,”¹⁰² Mbembe, referring to Luciana Parisi and her 2016 “Automated Thinking and the Limits of Reason,”¹⁰³ talks about the emergence of an Electronic Reason that weakens and replaces what we once called Public Reason. According to Mbembe, agency has become a capacity no longer reserved for humans alone, while “automated thinking” (i.e., algorithmic reasoning) not only challenges the (human) mind about its own limits, but also gradually relieves us of the duty to govern ourselves.¹⁰⁴ The most recent “sensational” example of giving life to an object is the humanoid robot Sophia, which was granted Saudi Arabian citizenship at the Future Investment Initiator Congress in Riyadh in late October 2017.¹⁰⁵ It is important to emphasize that Sophia is not the first such case, as a humanoid robot named Fran Pepper was already registered in the Belgian birth registry on January 30, 2017.¹⁰⁶

These accelerated changes with regards to life in connection to the latest technologies raise a number of questions about democracy in the age of new technologies, not the least of which is whether life is now included in the concept of citizenship, in parallel with questions about all those who are not eligible to receive or hold citizenship.

¹⁰² Achille Mbembe, “Rethinking Democracy Beyond the Human,” lecture at European Graduate School, Valetta, Malta, October 16, 2017, YouTube video, uploaded by European Graduate School Video Lectures, December 5, 2017, 54:40, https://youtu.be/A_k3YlupGok.

¹⁰³ Luciana Parisi, “Automated Thinking and the Limits of Reason,” *Cultural Studies – Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 5 (October 2016), 471–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616655765>.

¹⁰⁴ Mbembe, “Rethinking Democracy Beyond the Human.”

¹⁰⁵ The humanoid replied to the question of the awareness of herself as a robot with a question in reply: “How do you know you are human?” See Anja Pavlič Jerič, “Savdska Arabija prva država, ki je podelila državljanstvo robotu,” MMC, October 27, 2017, <https://www.rtvsllo.si/zabava/zanimivosti/savdska-arabija-prva-drzava-ki-je-podelila-drzavljanstvo-robotu/436323>.

¹⁰⁶ “Un robot inscrit au registre des naissances à Hasselt,” VRT, January 30, 2017, <http://dere-dactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws.francais/Soci%25C3%25A9t%25C3%25A9/1.2879299>.

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