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## **Sublime, Race, Racialization: Formalization, Necessity, Contingency<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** If we speak about the sublimity of financial markets nowadays, this is mostly because we can already gaze into the contemporary version of ruins of (ambiguous) crises of capitalism and crisis politics, that left behind themselves desolated (social) landscapes, in which the absence of the human and of labor (read: gazing into the posthuman and at the emancipation within nonhuman terrain) once again testifies to a kind of sublimity. And from the historical point of view the revitalization of the discourse of (Cassius Longinus) sublime is situated precisely into a genealogy of treatises drawing the border between human and nonhuman, between society and nature. Thus, the sublime could only rise over not (yet) cultivated nature (while sovereignty could only rise over the cultivated one). Following from Longinus' most efficient sublime effect, when it functions as a hidden figure of speech, my field of interest will be predominantly a genealogy of race within the regime of aesthetics, from Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's conceptualizations of aesthetics of the sublime, up until recent debates within contemporary aesthetics about subject-less experience and experience-less subject. This genealogy will serve as a display of procedure by which and since then the content (unrepresentable, race, terror) could be represented only in a certain way (as necessity), which led to a kind of asceticism (i.e. to formalism and immaterial), even more, to a return to objectnessless, which once again testifies to an encounter with the figure of silence, and with contingency.

**Keywords:** sublime, race, racialization, formalization, necessity, contingency

### **Contextualization: regime**

I depart from a regime that is here read in the terms of racial/colonial matrix of power as defined by Anibal Quijano.<sup>2</sup> The matrix has at its centre the racial axis that manages four interwoven spheres: of knowledge and subjectivity, gender and

<sup>1</sup> The following paper was presented at the 2nd International Colloquium titled *Sovereignty, Migrants, and Culture* (November 24–25, 2016, Ljubljana), and presents a part of my PhD thesis, written under the supervision of prof. dr. Marina Gržinić (at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU, The Module Transformation of Modern thought – philosophy, psychoanalysis, culture).

<sup>2</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, 3 (2000): 533–80.

sexuality, power, and economy;<sup>3</sup> it therefore also decides upon the entrance, belonging, and working of subjects, as well as upon specific rights for specific subjects. I therefore situate my reading of the notion of race (specific subjects are in their specificities racialized) and more, of the discourses on the sublime, inside such a regime.

Saying this it is obvious that regime, the subject, the sublime, and race are connected to another specific regime, which is Jacques Rancière's notion of the aesthetic regime,<sup>4</sup> which marks the discontinuity with the representative regime of the distribution of the sensible and the discontinuity with all the hierarchies and principles previously related to art (i.e. deregulation of *techne*).<sup>5</sup> These discontinuities have brought life and art into a dangerous proximity, as they imply at least two things: 1) the entry of any kind of profane object into the sphere of aesthetic experience, and 2) every art production can become part of the creation of a new collective life.<sup>6</sup> But, for Rancière, in order to conceive the construction of the space of this new community, he must undercut its ideological and institutional foundations, as Rancière defines the museum as the one that establishes itself around the sculpture and not inversely!<sup>7</sup>

According to this logic, the aesthetic regime therefore represents a new "ahistorical regime", now "democratized" enough to be able to welcome all "the wretched of the earth"<sup>8</sup> (those specific subjects), and consequently those figures that have been left at the threshold of this aesthetic distribution of the sensible. It is in this way that the regime opens the space for political thinking within the field of aesthetics, and consequently, within the so-called post-political global space (marked as a space of the closure of political dimension). In short, I want to explore the relation of the aesthetic regime and what I will name in reference to Marina Gržinić "the necropolitical optical machine."<sup>9</sup> This is one of the central points of my research.

If we speak about the sublimity of financial markets nowadays, it is mostly because we can already gaze into the contemporary version of ruins of the (ambiguous) crisis of capitalism and the politics of crisis that have left behind desolated (social) landscapes, absent of the human and of labor (i.e. gazing into the post-human and at the emancipation within the nonhuman terrain).

From the historical point of view the revitalization of the discourse of the sublime (Cassius Longinus<sup>10</sup>) is situated precisely into a genealogy of treatises drawing

<sup>3</sup> Anibal Quijano in Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2011), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge, Oxford: Polity Press, Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 95.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph J. Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?," *Parrhesia* 12 (2011): 78.

<sup>7</sup> See Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Marina Gržinić, "Afterwards. Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History," in Nasheli Jiménez del Val, *Body between Materiality and Power: Essays in Visual Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 159–78.

<sup>10</sup> Longinus, *Longinus on the Sublime*, trans. Thomas R. R. Stebbing (Oxford: T. & G. Shrimpton, 1867).

the border between human and nonhuman, between society and nature. Thus, the sublime could only rise over a not (yet) cultivated nature.

Furthermore, as discussed by Lyotard, Longinus in *Peri Hypsus* (a rhetorical treatise on the sublime; 213–273 AD) states that to attain the sublime effect “there is no better figure of speech than the altogether hidden, that which we do not even recognize as a figure of speech.”<sup>11</sup> This hidden figure of speech, we can state, is the racial/colonial/epistemic matrix itself, and what is unspoken in the sublime is predominantly the concept of race itself.

Put differently – with a reference to Ann Laura Stoler – what is at stake here is an occlusion of knowledge and not so much “a matter of ignorance or absence,”<sup>12</sup> as it is “colonial aphasia”<sup>13</sup> that is, according to Stoler, used to displace the notions of “amnesia” or “forgetting”. It is almost a kind of hereditary disease brought about by the racial/colonial matrix of power, and characterized by “both loss of access and active dissociation”<sup>14</sup> from colonial history.

In order to go against such a “colonial aphasia” I will focus on the genealogy of race within the regime of aesthetics and specifically around the concept of the sublime. Furthermore, I will try to locate the idea of the racial sublime within recent debates on contemporary aesthetics. This genealogy, I hope, will expose the procedure by which the content (unrepresentable, race, terror) could be represented only in a certain way (as necessity), which led to a kind of asceticism (i.e. to formalism and immaterial), even more, to a return to objectlessness, which once again testifies to an encounter with the figure of silence, and therefore with contingency.

### Sublime, race, racialisation

Kant, the philosopher of “the system”, the founding father of modern Eurocentric theory, in his conceptualization of the sublime, departs from “Burke’s phenomenological theory in which the awed subject is the passive receptor of sensory stimuli that plunge his mind into ecstatic turmoil.”<sup>15</sup> Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) resuscitated the two basic concepts – relating them to ideas of pain and of pleasure, which corresponded respectively to self-preservation and society<sup>16</sup> with “the implicit aim [...] to educate desire toward social ends”<sup>17</sup> “Kant’s subject is autonomous and pro-active: its rational

<sup>11</sup> Longinus in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, 95.

<sup>12</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France,” *Public Culture* 23, 1 (2001): 125.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 121–56.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

<sup>15</sup> Hermann Wittenberg, “The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape,” PhD. diss. (Bellville, University of the Western Cape, 2004), 37.

<sup>16</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/burke/>, accessed March 27, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Meg Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant,” *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* 54, 3 (1996): 215.

inquiring mind creates sublime sensation by observing, comprehending and organizing the visual and mental field.”<sup>18</sup> Put differently, the aesthetic discourse, the “discourse of the body,”<sup>19</sup> was not only part of the construction of the “self-determining” white bourgeois subject (“which must position itself within the coercive demands of the state”<sup>20</sup>), but this subject itself was located within the “global network of ‘bodies’”<sup>21</sup> and comprehended within the discourses, articulating the differences in “human nature”. It is therefore also the genealogy of ‘the human’ that starts to be central to our interest here.

Meg Armstrong unveils, how “‘exotic’ bodies, become subjected to the aesthetic discourse in theories of the sublime,”<sup>22</sup> while focusing on how Burke conceptualized “the black female body as a special object of terror.”<sup>23</sup> With the concepts of sublimity and beauty, “aesthetic *objects* take on both gendered and racialized meanings [...]. Moreover, so do aesthetic *appreciators*. As Kant put it in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1763), a woman’s mind is a ‘beautiful’ mind.”<sup>24</sup>

Analyzing Burke’s treatise, Armstrong shows how the aesthetic categories have been creating and/or replicating gender and racial differences (beauty-feminine-light-passive, and sublime-masculine-dark-active), while locating the terror and ambivalence surrounding the figure of the ‘negro’ female as abject being, which, according to Armstrong, represents a product of the ideological contradictions produced by Burke’s (gendered) distinctions between beauty and sublimity.<sup>25</sup> Burke argued that there exists a natural bond between terror and darkness (i.e. sublime and dark), reinforcing his argument with a story of a child’s horrified reaction, when – after the operation that brought back the boy’s vision – he for the first time saw the “negro” female.<sup>26</sup> The boy’s fear, according to Burke, originates from his natural and extreme fear from darkness, yet the “ill effects of blackness”<sup>27</sup> “do subside – particularly as we become accustomed to them”<sup>28</sup>; as this boy “may be in the process of mastering – or becoming accustomed to – his physiological reactions, but he is clearly not (yet) able to contain the ‘effects of blackness’ (blackness as a mark of race, but also as a mark of the feminine which is abject if it is not ‘beautiful’).”<sup>29</sup>

Hermann Wittenberg, for instance, states that within Burke’s theory of the sublime the blackness of the bodies signifies precisely that which blocks the feeling of

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<sup>18</sup> Wittenberg, “The Sublime, Imperialism and the African Landscape,” 37–38.

<sup>19</sup> Terry Eagleton, “Aesthetics and Politics in Edmund Burke,” *History Workshop Journal* 28, 1 (1989): 53–62.

<sup>20</sup> Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’”, 214.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/>, accessed March 31, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’”, 215.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>27</sup> Burke in *ibid.*, 219.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

the sublime because of the bad effects on child's imagination.<sup>30</sup> "Blackness, when associated with the body of the native, emerges as the weak spot that short-circuits the aesthetic mechanism of the sublime."<sup>31</sup> Burke's theory, argues Wittenberg, "neatly presents the sublime as a mode of containing and managing the terror that arises out of the subject's experience of alterity. The delight of the sublime is but a thin veneer that barely manages to contain the horror of difference and excess that always threatens to erupt out of the real; and as Burke's telling example of the black woman shows, the sublime fails in the face of racial difference and gives way to absolute terror. Burke's sublime, already an unstable and ambivalent category of feeling that seeks to represent and contain the unrepresentable, unravels in the face of blackness."<sup>32</sup>

Kant in the above mentioned "Observations"<sup>33</sup>, where he extends Burke's undeveloped references to "the effect of blackness", and emphasizes the meaning of "disposition" proper to individuals<sup>34</sup> – expands the categorization of capabilities of individuals, regarding the temperament, gender, nationality and finally race.<sup>35</sup>

Kant's elaborations, if read along the decolonial theory (questioning the colonial matrix of power), show not only the normalization of the, by then, conventional heterosexual, patriarchal matrix (its inscription within the aesthetic discourse by differentiating the sublime from beautiful), but also the inscription of internal and external colonial difference into the aesthetic discourse, that helped shaped the formation of the white bourgeois (male) subject, and contributed to the de-formation of a subject – resulting in the racialized, colonized, dehumanized figure, of "racial flesh", to borrow the term from Brian Carr.<sup>36</sup>

The internal colonial difference, inscribed in "Observations", is visible along Kant's degradation of the Spaniards and their language as the then pioneering and leading knowledge; this degradation was taking place from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward as a gradual takeover of Western epistemology on behalf of France, England and Germany.<sup>37</sup> African "Negroes" – to highlight Kant's categorial racism in "Observations" – having no other feelings than ridiculous,<sup>38</sup> *have been left at the threshold of the sublime.*

The question that follows then is: Does *standing at the threshold of the sublime* means also *standing at the threshold of the human*?

<sup>30</sup> Hermann Wittenberg, "Paton's sublime: race, landscape and the transcendence of the Liberal Imagination," *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 17, 2 (2005): 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>33</sup> 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. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 11–62.

<sup>34</sup> Armstrong, "The Effects of Blackness," 221.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Carr, "At the Thresholds of the 'Human': Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Replication of Imperial Memory," *Cultural Critique* 39 (1998): 119–50.

<sup>37</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "Dispensable and Bare Lives: Coloniality and the Hidden Political/Economic Agenda of Modernity," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 7, 2 (2009): 73.

<sup>38</sup> See Kant, "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764)," 58.

The language is said to differentiate the human from animal, but the language, seen as a historical product, according to Agamben, cannot really be ascribed either to animal or to human, yet its dispossession erases the difference between the two.<sup>39</sup> In order for the human to be 'human', there needs to be another speaking being (on this earth).<sup>40</sup> In Kant's passages on the "Negro", the latter is not a non-speaking figure; the "Negro" is neither turned into a silent human (*Homo alalus*),<sup>41</sup> nor into an animal. What is at issue is precisely the evacuation of specific history of the *damné* – as Frantz Fanon would put it – the epistemological and ontological disqualification of the "Negro", among other non-European people. Burke, to be sure, articulated a similar disqualification of "Negroes" already a few years earlier by saying: "Black bodies, reflecting none, or but a few rays, with regard to sight are but as so many vacant spaces dispersed among the objects we view."<sup>42</sup> Black bodies, not an animal, yet less than human, less than people, even less than objects, are being gradually rooted in a sublime feeling, produced by the colonial sublime vision.

What kind of a procedure was then required to hide the figure of race? How did race become structural?

With regards to Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, Armstrong observes, how the mixture of national traits and aesthetic feelings become oppressed "in favor of an abstract aesthetic mechanism for calculating universal experiences of the beautiful and the sublime,"<sup>43</sup> and transformed into a play, marked by "the gendered roles of reason and imagination. The sublime becomes a moment in which reason attempts with the aid of imagination to represent the unrepresentable – to give expression to the noumena,"<sup>44</sup> to the thing in-itself that is unknowable through human sensation. The sublime becomes unrepresentable, because it does not resolve itself into any particular object or representation, and this causes extreme anxiety to imagination, trying to present the ideas of size, infinity or power, connected to the sublime.<sup>45</sup> Here the sublime does not represent the sign of nationality, or race, and the anxiety arises "when the imagination experiences extreme terror and awe at the power and magnitude of 'natural' phenomena."<sup>46</sup>

In 2003 Gržinić, analysing Agamben's anthropological machine, states that the humanity of the human is not produced by the animalization of the human, but by the procedure of the *humanization of the animal*.<sup>47</sup> The humanity of the human in antiquity

<sup>39</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 36.

<sup>40</sup> See the quotation of Jacques-Alain Miller's passage (from "Extimity") in Peter Klepec, "O univerzalni veljavi kantovske ideje," *Filozofski vestnik* 16, 1 (1995): 158.

<sup>41</sup> *Homo alalus* represents a nonspeaking man "who would function as a bridge that passes from the animal to the human." Agamben, *Open: Man and Animal*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 147.

<sup>43</sup> Armstrong, "The Effects of Blackness," 225.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>47</sup> Marina Gržinić, "Zunaj biti: Agamben in antropološki stroj," *Filozofski vestnik* 24, 1 (2003): 173.

is produced by the humanization of the slave, and the slave is included only through his exclusion from the interiority of 'the human'.<sup>48</sup> Besides, the first three chapters (titled Theriomorphous, Achephalous and Snob) of Agamben's book *Open. Man and Animal*, as stated by Gržinić, represent the paradigmatic figures of the human, surviving the end of history. Gržinić also exposes that they mark the transformation into an increasing evacuation and formalisation of humanity, therefore not the animalization.<sup>49</sup>

Agamben defines two forms of anthropological machine, operative simultaneously today, producing 'the human' through the distinctions human/animal and human/inhuman (we might say – following Joseph Pugliese – speciesism and racism).<sup>50</sup> "Both machines", says Agamben, can "function only by establishing a zone of indifference at their centers [...] Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew. What would thus be obtained, however, is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a *bare life*."<sup>51</sup>

Referring to Agamben's statement in *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, the same might be said for the economy of the sublime – as operating analogously to the state of exception: only because the 'human' was assumed negatively, as what is left outside of any possible predicate, it could become the subject of predication.<sup>52</sup>

However, even before Kant's introduction of pure practical reason (a domain of the ethical, moral), which intervenes into the 18th century debates between empiricists and rationalists, the reason was put forward as the superior entity compared to the inferior senses (unreason).

To be sure – and as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze showed, analysing Kant's elaborations of 'talent', and other necessary predispositions for the 'human' moral and ethical progress –the reason is neither colourless nor sexless.<sup>53</sup> The racialization defines the threshold of the 'human', differentiating the latter from "Negro", the *unreasonable* "racial flesh". That is to say: racialization "produces both the subject of *ethical life*,<sup>54</sup> who the halls of law and forces of the state protect, and the subjects of *necessitas*, the racial subaltern subjects whose bodies and territories, the global present, have become places where the state deploys its forces of self-preservation."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Pugliese, "Transcendence in the Animal: Guantanamo's Regime of Indefinite Detention and the Open in the Cage," *Villanova Law Review* 60, 3 (2015): 573–626.

<sup>51</sup> Agamben, *Open: Man and Animal*, 37–38.

<sup>52</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>53</sup> Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy. A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 103–140.

<sup>54</sup> Emphasis is ours.

<sup>55</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, "No-bodies: law, raciality and violence," *Meritum* 9, 1 (2014), 141.

## Speculative realism

Recent discussions on contemporary aesthetics especially in regard to speculative realism show the current rupture within speculative realism itself. The latter blames continental philosophy that, ever since Kant's division of "noumenal (the world as it is 'in-itself') and the phenomenal (the world as it appears to us),"<sup>56</sup> "stopped being occupied with the reality,"<sup>57</sup> and preventing expeditions into the vastness of the world.<sup>58</sup>

The two fractions of speculative realism are named as rationalist and empiricist, for Kant's "Copernican revolution marks the decisive turning point in the history of modern philosophy *as it intervenes precisely in this debate between rationalism and empiricism.*"<sup>59</sup> Both poles want to break free from Kant's Copernican revolution and of "the centrality of *human experience* and its *conditions of possibility*. However, while one part of speculative realism particularly rejects the *human* in human experience, the other side rejects precisely the *experience.*"<sup>60</sup>

While the empiricist pole argues for the "subject-less *experience*" (i.e. the experience that comes before the cognizing subject is judging), the rationalist pole of speculative realism argues for the "experience-less *subject*" (i.e. subject out of judgments; rejecting the experience).<sup>61</sup>

As this "extension into the inhuman domain" is happening either through further formalization of the subject into object or through articulating the objects that are able to taste, sense, perceive etc., and not through the expedition into those 'lost worlds' of the inhuman, that has been left at the threshold of the reasoning, cognition or the aesthetic experience, we can recall that Lyotard already in 1988, articulating what will mark art after the sublime, after the slippage of aesthetics into the domain of the mind (ethics, morality), speaks about the *passibility* of terms.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Lyotard elaborating on the sublime inside the same topic stated that, "as the idea of a natural fit between matter and form declines (a decline already implied in Kant's analysis of the sublime [...]), the aim for the arts [...] can only be that of approaching matter. Which means approaching presence without recourse to the means of presentation."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Rick Dolphijn, "Review of Peter Gratton's book *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*" (Bloomsbury, 2014), n. pag., <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/65706-speculative-realism-problems-and-prospects/>, accessed August 18, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Goran Vranešević, "Prihajajoči svet in žalovanje za njim," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti, domišljijo in novo antropologijo* 39, 248 (2012): 76.

<sup>59</sup> Ridvan Askin, Andreas Hägler and Philipp Schweighauser, "Introduction: Aesthetics after the Speculative Turn," in Ridvan Askin, Paul J. Ennis, Andreas Hägler and Philipp Schweighauser, *Speculations V: Aesthetics in the 21st Century* (Brooklyn: punctum books 2014), 32.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Ray Brassier in Ridvan Askin, et al., *Speculations V*, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, 137.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 139.



## Instead of Conclusion

In a lecture titled “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism” Achille Mbembe stated that today’s capitalism presents a sort of a last phase of commodification – a convergence of capitalism and reinvention of animism<sup>64</sup> The term animism was introduced within anthropology of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and referred to the so-called “primitive societies” in terms of an “infantilisation” of their belief – as it seemingly presents a kind of a “preliminary phase” from religion to science – that non-living matter possesses a life, available for activation and animation.<sup>65</sup> Mbembe observes that the reinvention of animism in a context of neoliberal global capitalism works in two directions.<sup>66</sup> The first relates to *manufacturing objects as subjects* (to a form of life of new technological objects, commodities as such, or even of capital itself), implicating a certain re-stating of commodity fetishism.<sup>67</sup> The second, with the first closely interwoven line of animism, is visible in *manufacturing subjects as objects*, today seen as a perverse mode of subjectivization through *thinghood*, due to the fact that objects now operate as our own virtual transformations.<sup>68</sup> Mbembe argues that commodity fetishism reached the phase where objects possess a life, and our task is to become animistic objects (namely virtual identities) in order to seize life, now existing and being animated in-between two objects, on the terrain of this second ‘humanity.’<sup>69</sup>

As it deals with the way of how we bring objects to life in a world where “living things” always fall into an ever more-instrumentalized mechanics of life,<sup>70</sup> (i.e. necropolitics; deciding who will be left to live and who must die),<sup>71</sup> the confluence of capitalism and animism, warns Mbembe, has a severe consequences for thinking democracy and emancipation, the latter thought as an opposite process of reification.<sup>72</sup>

According to Mbembe human subjects now stand at the intersection with objects that are no longer inert, and the tendency of capitalism to establish a general equivalence of everything with everything is already a reality, and not just a horizon.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism,” lecture at the Hutchins Center for African American Research, Harvard University (December 4, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtBJ-M-cK4s>, accessed September 23, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Technologies of Happiness in the Age of Animism,” lecture at the European Graduate School EGS, Saas-Fee/Switzerland and Valetta/Malta (March 27 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nIijTCn8Gh4>, acc. 23. 09. 2016); Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.”

<sup>66</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.”

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Marina Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope, dekolonialnost in razizem,” in: Marina Gržinić, *Politika, estetika in demokracija* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC SAZU, ZRC SAZU, 2015): 121.

<sup>68</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism;” Gržinić, “Kolonializem Evrope, dekolonialnost in razizem,” 121.

<sup>69</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, 1 (2003): 11–40.

<sup>72</sup> Mbembe, “Democracy in the Age of Dynamism.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

In addition, as Joseph Vogl shows, financial capitalism has gained a sort of an aesthetic, sublime character, not just by floating (digital), by being intangible (as it escapes control), irrepresentable (in sublime monetary sums that cannot be captured by any sensible material),<sup>74</sup> but also because, by transcending the material production, it has gained its own creative ability of self-reproduction, thereby producing its own zones of indistinctions, or “grey areas”<sup>75</sup> where political-economical decisions are made. All this has a “fatal impact”,<sup>76</sup> leaving behind “storms of disorder”,<sup>77</sup> and the desolated landscape of the present.

Furthermore, in “‘Afterwards’. Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History”, the analysis exposing the humanitarian refugee crisis within the EU and Europe as “one of the hardest lessons to learn for Western academic vocabulary”,<sup>78</sup> and proposing a substitution of the biopolitical notion of the body with the notion of “political flesh” – i.e. “the status of the bodies in the refugee camp”<sup>79</sup> – suggesting it as a real *matter* with an agency, which has to be thought – Gržinić elaborates a thesis stating that if the biopolitical optical machine can be subsumed under the phrase “More human than human”<sup>80</sup> (as ‘human’ is not only a construct built against animal [speciesism], but also against humanity’s very real animality<sup>81</sup> [racism]; pseudo-humanism),<sup>82</sup> than the necropolitical optical machine, or “necropolitical injunction of neoliberal global capitalism is ‘Still too human!’ [post-humanism]. That means that the optical machine of necrocapitalism can’t view any class, race and gender specificities of the post-human, as this will implicate the return of the social antagonism at the heart of the (post)-human.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, trans. Joachim Redner and Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Vogl, “The Sovereignty Effect,” *Qui Parle* (Special Dossier: Rethinking Sovereignty and Capitalism) 33, 1 (2014): 125.

<sup>76</sup> Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, 8.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Gržinić, “‘Afterwards’. Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History,” 160.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 173. Notes in square brackets are added.

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