

Jovita Pristovšek

Academy of Visual Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Book Review: Marina Gržinić, Aneta Stojnić and Miško Šuvaković, ed., *Regimes of Invisibility in Contemporary Art, Theory and Culture: Image, Racialization, History*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 173 pp., ISBN 978-3-319-55172-2

In September 2015 the international conference titled *Image, Racialization, History* was held at the Faculty of Media and Communications (FMK), Singidunum University in Belgrade. Two years later this volume, edited by Marina Gržinić, Aneta Stojnić and Miško Šuvaković, represents a materialization of the event and an expanded collection of ten precise analyses, intersecting with each other and unfolding the links between historical and present status of what is known as the politics of the image. The volume traces theoretical, cultural, social, political and artistic discourses on the image and, vice versa, how all these listed discourses are embodied within images. Or, put differently, this volume presents a transdisciplinary and transdiscursive platform that confronts the regimes of in/visibility and intervenes into them by analyzing and contextualizing the role of images within violent colonial/racial processes of dehumanization of the past and present. The outcome is a process of unmasking the (colonial) “gaze” (historically as well as presently) that occupies the central role in “systematic procedure of discrimination, differentiation, seizure, and closure by capital” (13). From a wider angle, this volume is deeply indebted to Gržinić’s own theoretical corpus as well as a tribute to her more than 30 years of video-media artistic practice done in collaboration with Aina Šmid.

The volume opens with the *theoretical-political interventions* drawing upon Gržinić’s theory of the image. By introducing the *image-time-space-form-subject genealogy* (following the “evolution” of modes of capitalistic re-production), Gržinić exposes, what she names as the “*racialized unconscious*” of today’s images (since today’s colonial/racial divide operates from inside of every term¹). She starts from Deleuze, advancing to what she calls the virtual image and then posits the *trophy image* (e.g. Abu Graib selfies depicting “trophy bodies” of the prisoners, the “non-human”)

¹ See lecture by Marina Gržinić titled “Racialized Bodies, the Non-Human and the 21st Century Digital Mode of Production”, held at the symposium “The Unconscious of the Unconscious” (4th–5th December 2014, Zagreb, Croatia), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBf-SDwJ4H8>, acc. May 3, 2018.

– being a synthesis of time and space of subjugation, exposure, disappearance, and abandonment – as the emblematic image of our contemporaneity.

The trophy image, having in mind “Abu Graib selfies”, works with not less than a racialized form of its composition where time is simply absent and the space erased. This erasure is co-substantial with “the persistent erasure of history in necro-capitalism” (26). Therefore the question that rests to be answered is: what kind of subjectivities are formed or dis-formed with such trophy images? Within this process of *desubjectivation* (as dis-identification) those that rest, as maintained by Gržinić, are *the Wretched*, as “superfluous” (in terms of capital-labor relations) and the “disposable”. Yet, the “trophy image”, in the last instance, depicts a “trophy body” as a product of two discursive vectors (of specism and racism), assigning this body a status of animality and a *flesh* (belonging to all those who never possessed a “subjectivity”, “agency”, nor “body” that would be a “business” of a biopolitical “care”). Gržinić emphasizes that this crafted *flash* has a *political* status. It has a political potentiality precisely as a source of knowledge that, as she formulates, reveals daily the falsifications and travesties of Occidental humanity. The only question is if we dare to see.

In the second part we find reflections on the video artistic-political work by Gržinić and Šmid. Two pertinent *visual and curatorial deconstructions* of this opus are brought forward. Aneta Stojnić’s chapter introduces the notion of “radical contemporaneity” when reading the genealogy of politics of the image-text relationship of Gržinić/Šmid’s videos, while Miško Šuvaković discusses the aesthetic, epistemological and political effects of their artistic practice as well as of Gržinić’s own theoretical-political discourse.

The two following positions represented in this volume come as no surprise. Allana Lockward and Aleksa Milanović develop their main thoughts along the axis of decolonial Global South, former Eastern Europe and forms of liberation. Lockward discusses Afropean Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis practices influenced by the liberation and Pan-Africanist legacies of the maroon leaders who created the first Black Republic. Lockward’s global south’s position intersects with the former Eastern European conceptual legacies of the Bandung Conference (1955), the Non-Aligned Movement (1961), the decoloniality of knowledge and being (1998), and decolonial aesthetics/aesthesis (2009) – the latter focusing “on the forms of sensing and inhabiting the world that the modern/colonial order has suppressed” (6).² The coloniality embedded in western discourses, as the volume clearly shows, organizes and distributes the concept of life upon ideas of race, class and, as Milanović argues in his chapter, this is not only constructing the ideas of gender and sexuality, but also transposing the western norms and models on the rest of the globe, thus homogenizing and erasing diversities and traditions not fitting the occidental systems of classification and hierarchies.

² See <https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/>, acc. May 22, 2018.

Racialization

What we are left with is what we witness on a daily basis: a political/economic dispensability of life, neutralization of the political, and abandonment of western epistemology's responsibility as failed analysis of the unrestraint of capital and pure contingency of violence. All this is fundamentally connected to questions about forms of production of in/visibility that work hand in hand with logics of *de-humanization*, resulting in a shift that goes from humanity to "capital's humanization" (14). The chapter by Šefik Tatlić tackles this paradoxical topography precisely as a product of (liberal) ideology and (Eurocentric, humanist, and racist) Western epistemology. In tracing the gradual depoliticization of ideology, which, above all, allowed capitalism to optimize its own topography of power, Tatlić argues that "This paradigmatic twist, that placed the oppressive power in the infrastructural domain and [...] the economy in the superstructural domain, constitutes an inner architectonics of capitalism whose dynamics operates on the basis of the gradual merger of these two structural domains that constitute necrocapitalism. In this way necrocapitalism became unleashed, emancipated and ultimately gained sovereignty" (53–54).

This changed topography resonates also within Adla Isanović's elaboration of the database as a major neoliberal governmental technology, and as such being no less than materialization of biopolitical and necropolitical relations. With its fragmentary and manipulative qualities, database, the contemporary "archive – as much as and more than being a question of the past (the order of memory) – is a question of the present and the promise of the future" (34).

History

The last part of the book therefore shows that what is at stake is history. Federica Martini introduces the "analysis of Fascist displays from the perspective of exhibition history" to prove the regime's exhibition-making "as a consistent cultural situation in the visual arts, supporting the production – and not only the display – of discursive formations" (127), while Andrea Pócsik's chapter elaborates on the blurred boundaries of scientific and popular cultural visual representations that have a significant role in Romani's criminalization and their exclusion from the "nation." Jelena Todorović's analysis follows the archival traces of lost Rembrandt's painting *Quintus Fabius Maximus* (mythologized as *Pepca's Rembrandt*, once part of the State Royal Collection in the Royal Compound in Belgrade (SAC)), in order to deconstruct the myth around its disappearance, the image's history incorporated into the public imagination.

The book as a whole offers an extremely thorough theoretical platform, enabling us to comprehend the status of an image within global capitalism (and both) in relation to race, gender, class, migration, historicization and (de)coloniality. It brings a precise and dense theoretical reading of the role of an image in the digital era in administration and distribution of life and death itself.