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Differential Body Politic beyond Pacified Techno-Futures

Keywords
body, violence, racialization, digital coloniality, necropolitics, forensics, technologies of power

Abstract
By critically analyzing the status and differentiation of bodies and their lives, the author expands the vision of governmentality beyond the West in order to define the body beyond the pacified techno-promises of their emancipation through fragmentation, calculability and programmability. By elaborating the nature, power, and promises of dominant digital technologies and technobodies, the author conceptualizes them in relation to the shift between bio- and necropolitics/power and in relation to violence, (digital) coloniality, and racialization to which bodies are exposed. It is about the normality of violence against the Other, also in relation to the principle of separation of virtual bodies and "surplus flesh," which increases exponentially with technological development. The author seeks to understand how we have come to the point where techno-objects are humanized, given agency, while the body and life of the Other are dehumanized, deprived of any rights. The article contextualizes and re-politicizes the shifting relations between subject and object, particularly within our forensic contemporaneity.

Diferencialna politika telesa onkraj pacificiranih tehnoloških prihodnosti

Ključne besede
telo, nasilje, rasizacija, digitalna kolonialnost, nekropolitika, forenzika, tehnologije oblasti

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Povzetek
S kritično analizo statusa in razlikovanja teles in njihovih življenj avtorica širi pogled na vladnost onkraj Zahoda, da bi opredelila telo onkraj pacificiranih tehnoloških obljub o njegovi emancipaciji prek fragmentacije, izračunljivosti in programabilnosti. Z elaboracijo narave, oblasti in obljub dominantnih digitalnih tehnologij in tehnoteles jih avtorica konceptualizira v odnosu do premika med bio- in nekropolitiko, bio- in nekromočjo ter v odnosu do nasilja, (digitalne) kolonialnosti in rasizacije, ki so jim ta telesa izpostavljena. Gre za normalnost nasilja nad Drugim, tudi v povezavi s principom ločevanja virtualnih teles in »odvečnega mesa«, ki s tehnološkim razvojem eksponentno narašča. Avtorica skuša razumeti, kako smo prišli do točke, ko so tehnoobjekti počlovečeni, dobijo oblast, medtem ko sta telo in življenje Drugega dehumanizirana, prikrajšana za vse pravice. Članek kontekstualizira in repolitizira spreminjajoča se razmerja med subjektom in objektom, zlasti v naši forenzični sodobnosti.

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In October 2017, Saudi Arabia became the first UN-recognized country to grant citizenship to an anthropomorphized robot named Sophia ("Wisdom")—a status reserved for humans. Although Sophia is a robot, she enjoys more rights than women or foreign workers in this country where many people are virtually stateless and rightless.[1]

Just a few months earlier, the EU Parliament had proposed a set of regulations to regulate the use and creation of artificial intelligence, including the granting of "electronic personhood" (e-person status) on the most advanced machines to ensure their rights and obligations. Although this has not been accepted, discussions about their citizenship and personhood are very active. While considering rights of humanizing machines, refugees, migrants and unwanted locals are reduced to flesh and bones, deprived of any rights and left to die in the Mediterranean Sea and within the EU borders.

[1] On politics and economics of its (racial, gendered) design, performativity, and co-working of different regimes, see Jaana Parviainen and Mark Coeckelbergh, "The Political Choreography of the Sophia Robot: Beyond Robot Rights and Citizenship to Political Performances for the Social Robotics Market," *AI and Society* 36 (September 2021): 715–24, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-020-01104-w.

While the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the young ones, are leaving their country to achieve minimum conditions for a life, one of the leading politicians, in the 2022 election campaign announced the plan to replace this void, these citizens, with robots.

We live in a time marked by the vision that everything is programmable, including the body and life. As Achille Mbembe writes, reason is also under scrutiny as it is increasingly replaced by instrumental (weaponized) rationality and as "the human brain is no longer the privileged location of reason. The human brain is being 'downloaded' into nano-machines."[2]

Technoliberalism promotes the idea that technological development is leading us into a whole new phase of human emancipation (in which humans are liberated from the embodied constraints of race, gender, and class). We have reached a point where techno-objects are humanized and given agency, while the body and life of the Other is dehumanized, objectified, and deprived of any agency. The question is, how did we get to this point and where will it take us? How do today's technological devices relate to control over our bodies, our lives, and our deaths? And finally, what about potentiality?

Aiming to critically analyze the status and differentiation of bodies and their lives, this text extends the vision of governmentality beyond the West to define the body beyond biopolitics and pacified techno-futures. Thus, the democratizing potentials of digital technologies and technobodies are critically elaborated to challenge both prosthetics and democracies as our necropolitical reality is produced by extreme violence, coloniality, and racialization (both micro and macro racism) to which bodies and technologies are subjected.

In the context of this elaboration, the text argues that outsourcing violence and the invisibilization of colonial divide and racial cleansing is a strategic move of necrocapitalism and that in order to understand its modus operandi, we should also recognize the specificities of the new forms of fascism and dehistoricization in our contemporaneity.

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[2] Achille Mbembe, "Bodies as Borders," *From European South* 4 (2019): 14.

I argue that coloniality today is digital and that digital technologies and databases are the main technologies of power that control bodies and subjectivities, quantifying them and treating them as calculable objects. They are also differentiating bodies in order to cut off surplus flesh. Furthermore, I argue that databases and forensic contemporaneity should be conceptualized in relation to bio- and necropolitics/power.

My thesis is that necropolitical, database, and forensic turns are interconnected and are shifting relations between contemporary subjects and objects and their realities, while continuing to follow the logic of coloniality and racialization.

Finally, the text will address the potentiality that can also be seen in decolonial strategies of delinking, unlearning, counterforensics, and other critical practices.

The Body beyond Biopolitics and Pacified Techno-Futures: Violence, Colonial Divide, Racial Cleansing, and Its Invisibilization

Understanding the status of life and body politics, its relations to new technologies and potentiality requires its contextualization in relation to governmentality and its three dimensions: rationalities, techniques, and subjects of government.[3]

When Michel Foucault introduced the concepts of biopolitics and biopower in the 1970s, he explained how and why the biopolitical state is able to exercise authority over the behavior of populations and individuals at every level in order to "foster life" or "disallow it to the point of death" ("to live and let die"). However, as several authors have recognized, the concept of biopolitics is not sufficient to understand the changes and current logic of global capitalist neoliberal governability and the deathscapes of the 21st century (Achille Mbembe, Marina Gržinić, Ann Laura Stoler, to name a few). In short, Foucault's work did not directly theorize how colonialism is inherent in the process of biopower, past and present. It had to be repoliticized from the perspective of those who were not and are not counted as valuable enough for biopower. The first step, then, is to expand the vision of governmentality and sovereignty beyond the West.

3 Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: New Press, 2000), 219–20.

Achille Mbembe, in his 2003 text "Necropolitics," made this necessary connection by adding the concept of necropolitics to conceptualize the "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death"[4] that are related to the state of exception, the technologies of destruction, and the war machine of the global capitalist neoliberal world today. Expanded to include the concept of necrocapitalism, Gržinić elaborated further that the current logic is that of "let live and make die" and that racialization, exploitation, abandonment and the production of deathscapes, for the production of capital's surplus value, are implemented not only in the Third and Second, but in the First (capitalist) World as well.[5] Indeed, the necropolitical logic and measures of regulating life (bios) from the perspective of death (necro) form the core of global capitalist neoliberal governmentality.

Critically elaborating on the democratizing potential of digital technologies and cyborg bodies is also to question not only prosthetics but also democracies. Our necropolitical reality is determined by inherent violence, coloniality, and racialization to which bodies and technologies are exposed. They not only coexist, but rather collaborate with the Western concept of the peacefulness of democracy and global neoliberalism.

Mbembe has made an important contribution to this relation between violence and democracy with his work on what he calls the "inversion of democracy."[6] Mbembe argues that the "process of pacification of customs which led to contemporary democracies is inseparable from the production and reproduction of violence elsewhere"[7] and that "'the strength of modern democracies has always rested on their capacity to reinvent themselves and constantly invent, not only their form, but also their idea or concept' while, on the other hand, this 'was done

4 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 40, https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11.

5 See Marina Gržinić, "From Biopolitics to Necropolitics and the Institution of Contemporary Art," *Pavilion: Journal for Politics and Culture* 14 (2010): 9–93.

6 As Gržinić states, "Either we have democracy as a potential, or we have other forms of democracies that are inextricably linked to capitalism and violence." Marina Gržinić, "*Necropolitics* by Achille Mbembe: Extended Essay on the Book," *Filozofski vestnik* 42, no. 1 (2021): 228, https://doi.org/10.3986/fv.42.1.10.

7 As summarized by Ricardo Pagliuso Regatieri and Patrícia da Silva Santos, "The Nocturnal Body of Democracies," *Civitas* 22 (2022): 5–6, e41851, https://doi.org/10.15448/1984-7289.2022.1.14851.

at the cost of concealing their origins in violence.'"[8] More specifically, Mbembe situates the origins of the violence of contemporary democracy in what colonial capitalism created, providing an example of the "outsourcing of violence" to the colonies that occurred simultaneously with the pacification of Western societies. The colonies, as permanent spaces of exception, separated from the normal operations of civil life, were simultaneous with the metropolises (as sites of the rule of law), and their separation was based on racialization (which in this way contributed not only to economic growth but also to the pacification of civil life and the attribution of violence to the racialized body of the Other).

In addition, the colony was a site of experimentation with population management and technological developments that paved the way for violent tactics, warfare, and strategies of establishing camps outside of the colonies in the aftermath of colonialism.

The legacy of distancing from violence is also linked to numerous contemporary processes. For example, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s was perceived as happening not in the center of Europe but in the wild Balkans. In this case, the Balkan as a surplus of Europe stands for a separate and distanced Other. This continues today. When Russia launched an aggression against Ukraine in 2022, we kept hearing that the war in Ukraine was the first war on European territory since World War II (although the war crimes and genocide in the 1990s were the result of the turbo-nationalism and turbo-fascism that characterized the Greater Serbia project on the territory of the former Yugoslavia).

As Mbembe writes:

> The contemporary era is, undeniably, one of separation, hate movements, hostility, and, above all, struggle against an enemy. Consequently, liberal democracies—already considerably leached by the forces of capital, technology, and militarism—are now being sucked into a colossal process of inversion.[9]

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8 Achille Mbembe, *Politiques de l'inimitié* (Paris: La Découverte, 2016, Kindle), 30, quoted and translated in Regatieri and Santos, "Nocturnal Body of Democracies," 6.

9 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 42.

> Gradually replacing the proposition of universal equality, which, not so long ago, made it possible to contest substantial injustices, is the oftentimes violent separation of a "world without." This is the "world of undesirables": of Muslims encumbering the city; of Negroes and other strangers that one owes it to oneself to deport; of (supposed) terrorists that one tortures by oneself or by proxy; of Jews, so many of whom one regrets managed to escape the gas chambers; of migrants who flow in from everywhere; of refugees and all the shipwrecked, all the human wrecks whose bodies resemble piles of garbage that are hard to tell apart, and of the mass treatment of this human carrion, in its moldiness, its stench, and its rot.[10]

This principle of separation and enclosure, hatred and violence, has also penetrated the spaces of digital networks. Actually, as Mbembe notes, the violence has increased "hand in hand with an exponential acceleration of technological development and industrial innovation, the continuing digitalization of facts and things, and the almost universal advance of what might be called *electronic life and its double*, or *robotically adjusted life*."[11]

Racism is one of the primary mechanisms of necropolitics.[12] Complementing the systematic and institutional macro-racism of state apparatuses, there is another, fragmented, everyday micro-racism that attaches itself to minute details and is used to stigmatize and dehumanize the Other. Mbembe refers to this micro-racism as nanoracism ("that narcotic brand of prejudice based on skin color that gets expressed in seemingly anodyne everyday gestures, often apropos of nothing"[13] that recompose micro- in macroracism). Both forms of racism, according to Mbembe, are rooted in the history of modern Western democracy and its associated colonialism, which requires systemic inequality to function and sustain itself. As Gržinić recognizes, there is a direct link of Mbembe's concept of nanoracism with Margarida Mendes' concept of the "molecular form of colonialism" and "miniaturization of colonialism."[14] As Claudia Aradau and Tobias Blanke noted, while Mbembe's concept of nanoracism has so far received little attention, it is very helpful for understanding racialization of the algorith-

10 Mbembe, 38–39.

11 Achille Mbembe, "The Society of Enmity," trans. Giovanni Menegalle, *Radical Philosophy* 200 (November/December 2016): 30.

12 See Mbembe, *Necropolitics*; Gržinić, "*Necropolitics* by Achille Mbembe."

13 Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 58.

14 Gržinić, "*Necropolitics* by Achille Mbembe," 233.

mic reason and "to render the racializing effects of algorithmic othering through anomaly detection. Nanoracism helps us understand the transformation of minute or banal details, a 'small modification' into a potentially dangerous other."[15] As Gržinić explains: "The centrality of technology is once again revealed; digitalization brings the dimension of the nano-part [. . .] it goes hand in hand with nano-cameras and neo-fascism."[16] Nanoracism might appear as insignificant but is potentially deadly.

As Gržinić elaborated, the coexistence of biopolitics and necropolitics has far-reaching consequences. Among them is that the status of nation-states (old nation-states, colonial and antisemite, all sovereign states are now *war-states* in control of military and war-structures) is transformed into *necropolitical states* (that decide who should live and who must die). On the other hand, as she notes, "the old Eastern European states, the former Communist states, are all just nation-states and nationalism is their depoliticized violent ideology."[17]

This shift brings us to turbo-nationalist neoliberalism,[18] which has applied to Eastern Europe a specific format of fascism that Žarana Papić conceptualized as turbo-fascism[19] ("hegemonic postsocialist nationalisms in the Balkans in the 1990s, specifically in Serbia, i.e. national separatisms, chauvinist and racist exclusion or marginalization of (old and new) minority groups").[20] As Papić described, "Turbo-fascism in fact demands and basically relies on this *culture of the normality of fascism* that had been structurally constituted well before all the killings in the wars started."[21] Being raised on the "*normality of the evil* against the Other" in everyday life from the late eighties, turbo-fascism and Serb crimes

15 Claudia Aradau and Tobias Blanke, *Algorithmic Reason: The New Government of Self and Other* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 89.

16 Gržinić, "*Necropolitics* by Achille Mbembe," 234.

17 Marina Gržinić, "Introduction: Burdened by the Past, Rethinking the Future: Eleven Theses on Memory, History, and Life," in *Opposing Colonialism, Antisemitism and Turbo-Nationalism: Rethinking the Past for New Conviviality*, ed. Marina Gržinić, Jovita Pristovšek, and Sophie Uitz (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2020), 8.

18 Gržinić, 8.

19 See Žarana Papić, "Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascisation of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia," in "The Body/Le corps/Der Körper," ed. Marina Gržinić Mauhler, special issue, *Filozofski vestnik* 23, no. 2 (2002): 191–204.

20 Gržinić, "Introduction," 8.

21 Papić, "Europe after 1989," 199.

in Bosnia and Herzegovina were, as Papić writes, "not just a repetition but a *reinforcement*, and continuation of the Fascist crimes of the past Second World War. It is [. . .] a very malignant *continuation* of the 'reawakening of old ghosts.' "[22] Turbo-fascism and turbo-nationalist neoliberalism describe perfectly our political reality, not only in the 1990s, but also in the period after and today. Indeed, turbo-nationalism is on the rise throughout Europe, as is the normalization of violence against the body of the Other (be it a refugee, a migrant, or any other body that does not fit the role of a proper citizen).

This process is linked to other tactics of the same politics and power—and that is the erasure of history and the tactics of brutal and systematic dehistoricization, which in fact serves the necropolitics, the ongoing coloniality, and the growing fascist elements of politics that are at the core of governmentality both in the local context and in contemporary Europe. Gržinić wrote extensively and very precisely about how necrocapitalism profits from the forced erasure of the past producing more and more processes of dehistoricization and depoliticization. Whether it operates as a "pure trans-historical machine" (logic of neoliberal Western world) or through "embracing historicization as totalization" (former Eastern Europe embracing "turbohistoricization—turbo meaning a hyper-expedient, fast method of disposing of any other history than the nationalistic majoritarian one")[23] the result in both cases, as Gržinić points out, is the suspension of history that works with intention to dispose any alternative within it.[24]

However, as Gržinić points, turbo-nationalism and turbo-fascism are not about forgetting the genocide but about its glorification, while postmodern fascism is about "pseudo-amnesia."[25]

In all these processes, as well as in the politics of life and body and the politics of (in)visibility, technologies of power/knowledge play a crucial role.

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22 Papić, 200.

23 Gržinić, "Introduction," 2–3.

24 Gržinić, 5.

25 Gržinić, 9. On the postmodern fascism, see Santiago López Petit, *La movilización global: Breve tratado para atacar la realidad* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2009).

Digital Technologies (as Prosthetics of Power) and the Separation of the Virtual Subject from the Surplus Flesh

More than two decades ago, Gržinić critically analyzed the specifics of the development of new media outside the First (capitalist) World, including the war zones in the former Yugoslavia. She accurately pointed out that at the end of the 20th century we had digital traces, but no food.[26] While the world was talking about the promise of virtual bodies floating around, we simultaneously and literally had material bodies struggling to survive, war crimes, mass killings, and hiding bodies in the middle of Europe.

Similar to Gržinić, in the summer of 1995, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker published a text in the summer of 1995 about two events that took place on the same weekend in July 1995—these two simultaneous events were the "shipping" of Windows 95 in Redmond, Washington, and the fall of UN safe zone Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As Krokers recognized in the summer of 1995 when critically analyzing the technological acceleration and hype in the West that coincided with the genocide in Bosnia, the effect of this hype was the bitter division of the world and human bodies into a privileged virtual flesh and what they bitterly called a surplus flesh.[27] More precisely, the result of this division was total indifference to the various forms of violence to which the surplus flesh or Giorgio Agamben's "bare life"[28] is exposed and which are registered by all these brand new technological devices. At the end of the 20th century, Gržinić and Krokers have actually uncovered a clear colonial divide within a medium that was undoubtedly perceived as democratic.

Digital technologies, (digital) archives, and modern/capitalist/colonial systems have long been so intertwined that we can say that coloniality is now digital.[29] The digital mode of production is directly linked to global capitalism, capital/

[26] See Marina Gržinić, *U redu za virtualni kruh* (Zagreb: Meandar, 1998).

[27] Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, "Windows on What?," *CTheory*, August 24, 1995, https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14852.

[28] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[29] The term coloniality (which emerged in South America in the 1990s) identifies and describes the living legacy of colonialism in contemporary context that has survived formal colonialism and has been integrated into subsequent political and social orders.

power and democracy. Moreover, the coloniality of the concept of the "digital divide" supports the (re)production of new/old borders and divisions between the "developed" and the "developing" world, as well as the subjugation of certain bodies, knowledges, and cultures.[30]

Digital technologies are prostheses of power. As Mbembe has shown, we have arrived at this point through three simultaneous and interrelated "mega processes": *early 21st-century corporate sovereignty* ("unprecedented consolidation of power and knowledge (political, financial, and technological) in the hands of private high-tech corporate entities whose sphere of action is not one country or one region, but the globe");[31] *the computational speed regime* (technological escalation that has not only "redefined the nature of speed, unshackled markets and the economy" but is also continuously monitoring our behaviors in order to modify and optimize it);[32] and *the dialectics of entanglement and separation*.[33]

The computational regime,[34] or the digital mode of production[35] or rather what I call digital coloniality,[36] aim not only to enable the predictability of our behavior, but rather to turn the body and its life and all substances and phenomena into quantities. To convert them in technical means, to serialize them, and make them readable by computers. To capture, extract, accumulate, and automatically process data to identify, select, sort, classify, recombine, codify, to exclude, or to be excluded or used in manufacturing new types of services and devices that are sold for profit.[37] These technologies fragment the human body in order to recompose it to neutralize risk legitimized by security reasons.

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30 Dalida María Benfield, "Introductory Notes," in "Decolonizing the Digital/Digital Decolonization," ed. Dalida María Benfield, *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* 3, dossier 1 (September 2009), https://globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/projects/wko-digital-1.

31 Mbembe, "Bodies as Borders," 6.

32 Mbembe, 7.

33 Mbembe, 8.

34 Mbembe, 8.

35 Marina Gržinić, "Racialized Bodies and the Digital (Financial) Mode of Production," in *Regimes of Invisibility in Contemporary Art, Theory and Culture: Image, Racialization, History*, ed. Marina Gržinić, Aneta Stojnić, and Miško Šuvaković (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 13–28.

36 Adla Isanović, *Regime of Digital Coloniality: Bosnian Forensic Contemporaneity* (Frankfurt am Main: CEEOL Press, 2021).

37 Mbembe, "Bodies as Borders," 7.

Digital mode and databases facilitate this kind of management and control of people, from biometric data on refugees and migrants to extending borders into the human body, to forensic archives, financial data, and data mining. Digital technology is now the primary tool for controlling the human body and subjectivity. They "treat *life itself as computable object*."[38] For such visions, every body is predictable. There is also a distinction between potentially risky bodies and those that are not.[39] We live in a state of exception and control is implemented through these technologies.

Concrete political practices and decisions are now determined by knowledge extracted from databases and even executed by semi-autonomous decision-making technologies. As Eyal Weizman writes, calculation as a technique of government is undertaken by the powerful and "'on behalf' of those it subjugates."[40] Actually, this power is based "in the very ability to calculate" and to "act on these calculations."[41]

Viewing the body as an archive/database represents a return to the reductionist understanding of life and is based on the assumption that knowledge is already stored within it, just waiting to be extracted through technologies. Technologies are transforming human life into "biometric life" and citizens into data migrants. We are witnessing "a gradually extending intertwinement of individual physical characteristics with information systems—a process that has served to deepen faith in data as a means of risk management and faith in the body as a source of absolute identification."[42] The individualization of bodies and lives that these technologies enable does not make them politically significant, but rather prepares them for programmed visions. Such a practice, which seeks the ultimate truth about the subject in the objectified properties of his or her body, which views the body as an archive, is reminiscent of old colonial concepts and practices.

In his analysis of "human-machine-algorithmic apparatuses" and "death by metadata" that define drone-based military force and the practice of kill-

38 Mbembe, 14.

39 Mbembe, 8–9.

40 Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (London: Verso, 2012), 17.

41 Weizman, 17.

42 Mbembe, "Bodies as Borders," 9–10.

ing-at-distance, Joseph Pugliese introduces the notion of the bioinformationalization of life,[43] meaning that living bodies are reduced to informational "patterns of life"[44] that can be algorithmically processed as killable targets or not.[45] In contrast to the propagated scientificity that legitimizes this, Pugliese defines this algorithmic process as an "art of *divination*"[46] that is not only inherently imprecise, but also subject to the racial and gender biases of its human architects.[47]

Furthermore, as Pugliese writes, the law is nowadays erasing the link between the executor and the executed, and robotic wars become normalized as part of civic life.[48] Analyzing what he calls the practice of *sparagmos* (Greek term for the ritualized dismemberment and dispersion of corpses), he refers to the art of killing "that dispersed and attenuated the role of any individual in the act of murder."[49] In fact, this erasure of the human killer is occurring in our time simultaneously with the process of humanization of technology (i.e. AI).

Finally, in relating these digital technologies, databases, and knowledge production to biopolitics/biopower and necropolitics/necropower, I argue that if the archive is a biopolitical tool that plays a crucial role in governance, then databases should be conceptualized in terms of the shift between biopolitics and necropolitics, biopower and necropower.

Databases are the main power technology of global neoliberal governmentality. They are able to strategically capture, model, control, and secure the gestures, behaviors, and discourses of living beings by determining what we have been,

43 Joseph Pugliese, *Biopolitics of the More-than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 37.

44 Pugliese, 178.

45 Pugliese, 178–79.

46 Pugliese, 184.

47 Pugliese, 184–87. See also Michael J. Albert, review of *Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence*, by Joseph Pugliese, *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 17, no. 3 (October 2021): 648–51, https://doi.org/10.1177/17438721209708 71c.

48 Joseph Pugliese, "Prosthetics of Law and the Anomic Violence of Drones," *Griffith Law Review* 20, no. 4 (2011): 931–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/10383441.2011.10854726, quoted in Raenette Taljaard, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Drone Warfare and Drone Norm Life Cycles" (PhD diss., Stellenbosch University, 2020), 161.

49 Pugliese, *Biopolitics of the More-than-Human*, 37.

what we are no longer, and what we are becoming (operating at the intersections of power and knowledge relations).[50]

The Body within Necropolitical Forensic Contemporaneity and Shifting Relations between Subject and Object

I have explained the work of the database and the digital power of identification, calculation, separation, and of ordering of various forms of life and the living body in general, but what about the death and devastation that necropolitics leaves in its wake?

As part of contextualizing the contemporary body-politics, I propose to acknowledge the "forensic turn."[51] The reason for this is that, simultaneously with the shift between bio- and necropolitics and power in the wake of extreme violence, mass deaths, and atrocities, we have a development and prevailing usage of forensic methods and aesthetics through different "forums" (i.e., international humanitarian politics, law, but also art). They play a key role in the politics of visibility, the ways of seeing, knowing, and communicating, in ordering the visible. Political and legal decisions are based on them. Digital technologies and databases support this emergent sensibility attuned to material investigations.

There are numerous examples of the entanglement of death and body politics through forensics. For example, writing of forensics as commercial services, Silvia Poscocco analyzes the case of transnational adoption and surrogacy that make explicit the relations between war, structural violence and crisis, and of global shifts in the organization and governance of reproduction.[52] Through this concrete contemporary example from the globalized borderlands between Guatemala and Mexico, she shows the "interrelatedness of vitality and death, and the nexus between biopolitics and necropolitics."[53]

50 I developed this thesis in *Regime of Digital Coloniality.*

51 Eyal Weizman, "Introduction: Forensis," in *Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, ed. Forensic Architecture (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 9–32.

52 Silvia Posocco, "Harvesting Life, Mining Death: Adoption, Surrogacy, and Forensics across Borders," *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v8i1.35071.

53 Posocco, 1.

In my 2021 book *The Regime of Digital Coloniality: Bosnian Forensic Contemporaneity*, I approached forensics through the analysis of other examples, including those related to Bosnian forensic contemporaneity. One of the reasons for this focus is that in the last 20–25 years, the forensic reality in Bosnia, the mass graves and related war crimes, and especially the bodies dismembered and dispersed through them, have played a crucial role in the development of forensic science and new forms and practices of knowledge production and visibility. If after Auschwitz we had the era of the witness (based on the voice of survivor), international courts established after the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda started the new one: the era of *the evidence of things*.

The thesis I argue is that necropolitical, digital/database, and the forensic shift are interrelated and that together they shape and change the relations between contemporary subjects and objects and their realities.

The rise of the politics and aesthetics of the database and forensics is changing the capacity of witnessing and transform the role of testimony. It is a shift from speaking subjects to "objects that speak," to an object-oriented juridical culture. More precisely, the forensic sensibility seeks to displace human testimony (the fragility of the witness's memory, the complexity of the subject, and the ambiguity of language) and turns instead to material science, probability calculations, and/or in some cases even (semi-)automated interpretative technologies, promoting objects, data, forensic practices and technologies as neutral, objective, and more trustworthy. In an age that celebrates automatization, algorithmic regimes and the integration of language with code, these technologies are promoted as the greatest authority.

To return to the Bosnian example, while in biopolitical archives the body is fragmented to be recomposed in a certain identity (to be programmable), in necropolitical turbo-fascistic (primary, secondary, even tertiary) mass graves the body is fragmented and dispersed in order never to be reconnected again. Its aim is complete erasure.

For this reason, mass graves and excavated bones have made the forensic method central to the postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina—its democracy, justice, and memory. In this way, digital technologies and forensics entered the political space. Forensic methods enabled the bones to recover their name and voice,

their identity, to make visible the body, what turbo-fascism wanted not only to eliminate, but to erase completely from concrete space, history and knowledge.

Forensics is seen as a methodology that allows the community to bury those who were tortured and executed and thrown and scattered in various mass graves, but also as crucial to the status of knowledge, visibility and potentiality.

It is important to emphasize that after the denial of genocide by Bosnian Serb politicians and Serb leaders, with continuous historical revisionisms, erasure of memory and erasure of history—as the last phase of genocide—today we are actually witnessing its glorification and celebration, rehabilitation of fascist ideologies. Turbonationalism and turbo-fascism are on the rise not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but, unfortunately, throughout Europe. Apart from the fact that we keep hearing "Never again!" Because of this palpable threat, the knowledge and visibility of the Bosnian forensic archives are crucial.

So the question that arises in the next, concluding section of this text is actually the question of potentiality.

Potentiality: On Resistance and Decoloniality

As elaborated, there is an uneven distribution of life and death forms and their possibilities, accumulation, and dispossession as bodies and their data inhabit and move through contemporary contexts.

In addition to that, human bodies are increasingly embedded in complex techno-structures and techno-bodies. The new technologies inserted into the human body bring new complexities and have contributed significantly to theoretical discussions of "body drift" (Arthur Kroker) and the posthuman future. These notions of body drift are based on the ideas of posthumanism and the body of complexity brought about by the "data flesh" and the "regime of computation" (Katherine Hayles), "companionism" and hybridities of bodies (Donna Haraway), postmodernism and the contingent body (Judith Butler), etc.[54] However, what is missing from these visions of the multiplicity of bodies as they

[54] See Arthur Kroker, *Body Drift: Butler, Hayles, Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

are lived today (bodies as gendered, sexualized, labored, disciplined, imagined, and technologically extended) is the racialized body. Questions about the future of the body in a society dominated by computers, challenged by the ideas of companion species, and this war regime in which we live, unfortunately seem to constantly avoid the question of the racialized body.

Human-machine-algorithmic prostheses are primarily available to those who fit the figure of the human ("unhumans" have no access to them). Moreover, how human-machine-algorithmic prosthetics, including robots, AI, and other digital technologies, serve as "slaves," or "surrogates for human workers within a labor system entrenched in racial capitalism and patriarchy,"[55] is rarely addressed. As Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora show, both racialization, coloniality and patriarchy are fundamental to human-machine interactions and to the definition of the human. While simultaneously promising a revolutionary and bright future, "they replicate and reinforce racialized and gendered ideas about devalued work, exploitation, dispossession, and capitalist accumulation."[56]

However, there is still the possibility of designing alternative models of technology that reject the racial and colonial logics that sustain the current order of things and master-slave relations.

First, as Arturo Escobar[57] and other decolonial theoreticians, including Walter Mignolo, urge, instead of universalist paradigms that define governmentality, meaning and interpretation within "Western cosmology" as "epistemic hegemony,"[58] we should move to *pluriverse*, plural ways of imagining life on the planet, alternatives coming from different geo-localities and body positions and, importantly, not to a new universalism.

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55 Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots, and the Politics of Technological Futures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), blurb.

56 Atanasoski and Vora, blurb.

57 Arturo Escobar, "Sustainability: Design for the Pluriverse," *Development* 54, no. 2 (June 2011): 137–40, https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2011.28, quoted in Ahmed Ansari, "What Knowledge for the Decolonial Agenda in the Philosophy of Technology?," in *Distributed*, ed. David Blamey and Brad Hylock (London: Open Editions, 2018), 185–97.

58 Walter D. Mignolo, "On Pluriversality," *Walter Mignolo* (blog), October 20, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20140629144207/http://waltermignolo.com/on-pluriversality/.

Dominant science and technology policies are predominantly those of the old imperial powers and shaped by coloniality. They approach the Other as non-agents, or rather as spectators.[59] The same is true of digital technologies as prosthetics of power and the societies they serve. Other knowledge is muted—not recognized, unwanted, not asked for.[60] The idea that technologies must be imported from the developed West is part of the colonial narrative of bringing civilization and modernity to supposedly violent, backward geolocations and bodies (idea of humanizing racialized Others through imposition of technological solutions).

We need to find alternative ways to think about technology and technicity. We need to *delink*, to use Mignolo's term, from the modernity and modern technicity and practice "thinking from the borders"[61]—to decolonize knowledge bodies, and the technologies linked to them.

As Mignolo and other decolonial scholars have shown, delinking does not mean disappearing. Rather, it means *reconnecting* and reappearing differently. It also means requestioning the genealogies of technology in relation to modernity and beyond it, as something other than what it might be; questioning the role of technology in shaping our bodies, subjects, and subjectivities, repurposing it for new purposes, or shaping it differently-because technology has the potential to be both "poison and cure."[62]

In analyzing the relationship between technology and coloniality, for example, Gertajn van Stam writes how "the I-Paradigm," the individual, aligns with assessments of how Western culture and modernity "calls for the limiting of oneself in one's private, egotistical 'me', with a tightly isolated circle where one

59 Gertajn van Stam, "Appropriation, Coloniality, and Digital Technology, Observations from Africa," in *Proceedings of the 1st Virtual Conference on Implications of Information and Digital Technologies for Development (IFIP 9.4)*, ed. Silvia Masiero and Petter Nielsen (Oslo: Department of Informatics, University of Oslo, 2021), 712, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2108.10087.

60 Van Stam, "Appropriation," 712.

61 Walter D. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience," *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 273–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105.

62 Ansari, "What Knowledge." In reference to Derrida's *pharmakon*.

can satisfy one's own urges and consumer whims."[63] What he highlights are individualism and universality as dominant paradigms guiding "contemporary renderings of digital technologies."[64] In the African context, on the other hand, the focus is rather on "aligned *being*"[65] and the "We-Paradigm—the paradigm of *interbeing*—[that] sees universalized, normative knowledge as external to the community, and is quick to link such knowledge to external belief systems, power and domination."[66] Interbeing is something that "exogenous digital technologies appear to have great difficulty recognizing."[67] In van Stam's words, the alternative is about shifting the paradigm from *individualism* to *community*—"with its social-personhood—issues of colonialism fall away" (since the "We-paradigm is incompatible with notions of supremacy, hegemony, and domination," as well as with colonialism).[68]

Speaking of strategies of resistance and potentiality, Ariella Azoulay, using photography as an example, suggests moving its origin from the realm of technologies to the realm of body politics. In her book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Azoulay shows that the institutions that make up our world, from archives and museums to notions of sovereignty and human rights to history itself, are all dependent on imperial ways of thinking, on the ordering of time, space, and politics.[69] She argues, however, that by practicing what she calls potential history, we can still reject the original violence and try to repair our broken world by looking at the past, the institutions, and their political tools that served to destroy people, objects, and whole worlds.

Paula Gaetano Adi applies Azoulay's "principle of reversibility," meaning that we go back to 1492 as the "marker of reversibility" and imagine that the origins

63 Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Other*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (London: Verso, 2008), cited in Van Stam, "Appropriation," 715.

64 Van Stam, "Appropriation," 715.

65 Van Stam, 789. "The single human being is understood as *a person*, a human entity within a social network of relationships with companions, ancestors, the living, and the yet to be born, as well as non-humans." (Van Stam, 715)

66 Van Stam, 715.

67 Van Stam, 715.

68 Van Stam, 715.

69 Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

of AI technology go back to the fifteenth century, not the Cold War.[70] Actually, we propose here to apply Azoulay's work to think of other technologies that are "crucial in establishing a 'differential body politics' necessary to justify and reproduce imperial and destructive practices."[71] *Unlearning* then "means to foreground the regime of imperial rights that made its emergence possible."[72] In that sense, unlearning robots "means to foreground an imperial regime of forced labor, exploitation, rationalization, and instrumentality that made possible the emergence and flourishing of this technology."[73]

What would it mean if we extended this method to databases, computers, and algorithms, tracing its origins back to the fifteenth century? Following Azoulay's proposal, this would mean unlearning the origins of these technologies as told by their inventors, "capitalist investors, by statesmen and military forces, by those who claimed to own images of others,"[74] the data of others, "by those who invaded others' world as part of extractive expeditions,"[75] both physical or virtual. Rethinking the origins, history, practices, and futures of robots, and exploring them as part of the governmentality in which we live and die today.

The origins of robots and AI lie, as Gaetano Adi writes, "when the category of the Human was invented"—that is, as suggested by Walter Mignolo, "when a selected community of humans of a given religion, in a continent called Europe and around fifteen century, self-defined themselves as humans in their praxis of living and being, and applied their self-definition to distinguish, classify and rank lesser humans.'"[76] Their invention goes hand in hand with "the quest to digitally mimic human cognition [that] is no more than a new reincarnation of the imperial concept of the 'Human as Man,' who placed his capacity for rea-

70 Paula Gaetano Adi, "Imagine Going on Strike: Intelligent Machines," Verso Books (blog), March 3, 2022, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5269-imagine-going-on-strike-intelligent-machines.

71 Gaetano Adi.

72 Azoulay, *Potential History*, quoted in Gaetano Adi, "Imagine Going on Strike."

73 Gaetano Adi, "Imagine Going on Strike."

74 Ariella Azoulay, "Toward the Abolition of Photography's Imperial Rights," in *Capitalism and the Camera*, ed. Kevin Coleman and Daniel James (London: Verso, 2021), 27.

75 Azoulay, 27.

76 Walter D. Mignolo, "The Invention of the Human and the Three Pillars of the Colonial Matrix of Power," in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 153–76, quoted also in Gaetano Adi, "Imagine Going on Strike."

soning at the center in the self-definition of humanity" again, reinforcing racial and colonial logic while "also upholding the technoliberal project that promise revolutionary liberation from labor inequality, dispossession, differences, and exploitations."[77]

In short, unlearning technologies of power means asking what it means to be a "Human," it means "to expand and re-claim a definition of life and humanity offered by the possibilities of the artificial." In that sense, the artificial could be seen as "our opportunity to not only renegotiate our future, but to re-claim the very conditions of humanity today." That is why Gaetano Adi calls to consider robots as "*comrades* in the flight for repairing our shared world," as a potentiality, "as a way out to capitalism, modernity and colonization; as our opportunity for rewinding and unlearning the imperial violence inflicted by digital technologies, artificial intelligence, data analysis, and machine learning."[78]

Similarly, forensics and databases could be our companions in the struggle against racialization and violence, to create other visions of bodies and lives, to reclaim our world and our agency, to create new ways of seeing and open possibilities for "the future of conviviality."[79] However, the struggle must not be limited to technologies themselves, but must be conducted in conjunction with other critical, denormalizing, and decolonizing practices.

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77 Gaetano Adi, "Imagine Going on Strike."

78 Gaetano Adi.

79 See "Project," Genealogy of Amnesia: Rethinking the Past for a New Future of Conviviality, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, accessed August 5, 2023, https://archiveofamnesia.akbild.ac.at/.

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