

### 3. Amity Lines

---

The long, slow unfolding of ecological crises makes the undoing of life legible in the present moment and forces us to vigilantly watch and count and extrapolate. The duress of human existence on the more-than-human world is felt viscerally and immediately, but at the same time – absurdly – somewhere far beyond these lifetimes, incomprehensible to daily cadences. Repetitions and echoes of old ways of being in the world are cocooned within dizzying pirouettes of denial and refusals of collective action.

Amidst the backdrop of collapse, there is an appealing tendency to reach into the far recesses of nostalgia, yearning for an originary thrown-out-of-paradise being-togetherness, a flailing kind of denialism cloaked in unapologetic romanticisms. Denial of death, denial of the crises, denial of the stakes, denial of the pain and suffering to come. This existence presents as surplus life, unnecessary life, wasted life – a necropolitics extrapolated to more-than-human lives amid calls to index and footnote the catastrophe to come.

If friendship demands exposure – if friendship is always necessarily entwined with the grief of losing that friend – what kinds of loss might be encountered at the end of this world: when it dawns on us that not only will we have to leave it, but now this world, at least in substantive part, will leave us, and is in fact leaving us now in an early and unjustifiable death?

As species and ecosystems cascade into extinctions, what happens if we cast our relationship with more-than-humans not as enemies, nor as supplicants to an abstracted Mother Nature, nor as kin – but as exposed

to one another? The face of finitude is, ultimately, to be captured by an inside, by a being-in-common grief. If any ecology demands that we find good relations with the more-than-human, then why not as friends?

We live in an era that demands the very idea of nature come under interrogation. It is easy to claim that 'we' humans are destroying 'nature' but that formulation is unhelpful at very best. The more-than-human world is not helpless – it assaults us as callously as we do it, virally ending any idyllic reveries, demanding aggressive adjustment and defense just for us to get by.

As the ancient glacial fields melt beyond recognition, the world spins slightly off-kilter, off-pace, in new arrhythmias. The world can indeed go on without humans – and it will probably be better off and more interesting. Death denial as an act of self-preservation manages anxieties and excesses in myriad, dysfunctional ways including overconsumption, the accumulation of debt and addictions and technologies to manage disorders. And still, the world does not mourn us.

In rethinking and remodeling the work of togetherness today, we want to think beyond and around these closures of thought. The finitude of collective death cannot fuse a collective-in-finitude. Viral grief exposes us all, and not in any *we're-all-in-it-together* hallucinations. None of us are ever in *anything* together, distantly or otherwise, we are left to our bodily and corporeal exposure, to each other and to the more-than-human, just trying to survive.

The colonial state is permanently on a war footing: its prime directive is always self-preservation as an organizational form, and thus it is stuck in a permanent state of insecurity and frantic administration – constantly on defense against human and other-than invaders. Sovereignty is determined by who has the right to kill and who can determine who is disposable: a necropolitics that subjugates life to the power of death. What else are these fire-charred nightmares of global warming and sickness but necropolitics in everyday action?

The camp, the plantation, the reserve, the colony are outside, or an exception to the law by their very premise and are thus subsumed as part of the cultural façade and inertia of democracy. Mbembe argues that, "in these conditions, it might well be that, at bottom, no one is the citizen of

any state in particular[...]. Becoming-human-in-the-world is a question neither of birth nor of origin or race.”<sup>1</sup>

The question of freedom arises in the very act of distancing oneself from our places of birth or acquired nationalities: why does the randomness of our birth in a particular location determine our freedoms, including movement and the extent of freedoms we inhabit? What is the binding logic of the passport, the status card, the customs line?

Without movement, there cannot be politics, or as Hannah Arendt put it, movement is “the substance and meaning of all things political.” The Soviet Union used to refer to itself as the homeland of socialism, but for Karl Marx, ‘workers have no homeland’: it cannot be the capture of belonging, but movement that politicizes the political.

It may have been disorienting at first to see mass-scaled anti-vaccination rallies throughout the pandemic featuring open fascists and white nationalists arm-in-arm with back-to-the-landers and conservation ecologists. The commonalities soon became clear: both camps rely on nostalgic fixities, renditions of a world-made-right, yearning for a time when people knew their place, when it was clear where everyone belonged, and fidelities were simple.

The intense management of movement between and within nations is a relatively recent phenomena – the modern passport was introduced only after WWI – but has grown so thick that states themselves are now zones of permanently administering bodies. The idea of freedom is bound up with the ethics of movement, of non-fixity, and is hardly foreign to any of us. Take queer subcultures for example who are constantly remaking every standard of being-together, dismissing all the disciplinary narratives of temporal inevitability, the ‘progress’ of heteronormative commands to monogamous coupling, cohabitation, property purchase, equity building, procreation, passing down generational wealth.

The never-satisfied, always restless, always hungry demands of progress and development can never abide by unworking, by any ab-

---

1 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*. Trans. Steve Corcoran. Duke University Press, 2019, 187.

sence of success. The managerial directive *We are all in this together* is a blunt tool, most obviously disciplining the *we* and the *together*, but at least as importantly, fetishizing the *this*, eagerly optimizing virally reproductive isolations to enforce progress as an operational command. Exposure is weakness and you can never show your enemy weakness, especially to the more-than-human.

The upending of fidelity that movement demands suggests a new set of relations, one that does not retreat into nostalgic conservation nor teleologies of progress. Maybe the ecological crisis is itself a horizon of possibility – a landscape where no one ever needs a passport, a place where politics and good relations are indistinguishable from one another. The movement that freedom requires asks for new, unfixed ways to be-together.

What might a borderless world even look or feel like? The idea invokes constant negotiation, compromise, fluidity and non-fixity. It sounds like a certain kind of freedom, but also sounds insecure and unsettling, uncomfortable, wildly dangerous. Neoliberalism promises market liberty and a borderless freedom of accumulation, but simultaneously enforces a dense fabric of biopolitical control, aggressively policing and containing certain bodies with extreme prejudice. The neoliberal landscape simulates a certain kind of borderless world, but only for a privileged few, and predicated on thick borders for most.

The idea of borderlessness can be mobilized for many other kinds of purposes. Continuing American claims of Manifest Destiny have always ignored borders as justification for interference in the internal affairs of other countries, an unapologetic rationale for imperialism. Conversely, the border, in the face of muscular forms of state power, is also the defense against aggressive forms of power. Borders are often about protection – they are boundaries that lay down the line where power cannot cross, where identity is preserved and differences are maintained. Borderlessness is no utopia in of itself: in the actually living world borders serve many masters, but to think past nationalist closures, we have to think past those borders. The violence and existential threats of our times demand we imagine different ways to be-together.

The more-than-human world is marked by different renditions of borderlessness. Human observers have long presumed that animal territoriality mimics human regimes of private property – that animals all have distinct areas that they attempt to monopolize and defend from their own and other species. Ethologically that's a highly dubious proposition. It's far truer to say that members of a species have 'home ranges' they inhabit, areas that overlap with many other species that simultaneously practise co-avoidance and cohabitation with one another. The same holds true for non-animal species: there is evidence of what might be seen as territorializing behaviours among some plants, but animated by logics a universe away from anything most humans can recognize as familiar. The more-than-human world is built of innumerable overlapping and dynamic sets of space-use arrangements, relationships that are constantly being produced, negotiated and re-negotiated.

Humans are always producing territory, long before any performative lines on a map. The more-than-human world is constantly moving in fluid and borderless space, remembered, forgotten and renovated. We are not interested here in some romantic rendition of the more-than-human world and are not suggesting the rest of the world as some model for humans to sycophantically replicate. So much of the more-than-human world is awful and violent and deplorable: from murder and infanticide and cannibalism, to rape and pillage and abandonment. But we do want to suggest that the idea of borderlessness is hardly foreign to the human nor the more-than-human world.

It is our contention that our lived experiences of friendship might be able to provide some raw materials for thinking borderlessness. Friendship does not have to always be congenial or even friendly – it can be astringent and agonistic and malleable – but friendship is always voluntary, and thus always an exercise in agreement. We submit that any friendship, no matter its depth or breadth, is definitionally marked by a substantive concern for the other, which is the basis for the good relations that an ecological world requires.

