Pandemic: Invisibility and silence

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Abstract: Can the Covid pandemic be understood in any other than ecocritical and decolonial terms? It has brought nothing new except perhaps a certain fatalism in politics, borrowed from eco-catastrophism. Apocalyptic visions of migration, Anthropocene, pestilence and neo-populism exacerbate longer-term trends. Religious fanatics with machine guns take whips to outsiders whose gender or skin-colour they despise at the behest of billionaire warlords from the Texas border to Kabul. But Covid-19 coincides with some intriguing cultural novelties, most of all a plague of visibility traced here through Ana Lily Amirpour's film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, paired with a simultaneous mode of disappearance associated with the video image. Hegemonic transitions, the rise of financialization and extractive postcolonization tie pandemic to fading (and therefore vengeful) American individualism and the rising (and therefore aggressive) Chinese command economy. The virus is occasion for profit: only a new and ecologically-scaled cosmopolitanism can save us.

Keywords: Coronavirus. Ana Lily Amirpour. Neo-populism. Information capital. Ecocritique. Decolonizing.

Can the Covid pandemic be understood in ecocritical and decolonial terms? Can it be understood in any other?

Four versions of apocalypse

St John's *Apocalypse* calls them famine, pestilence, war and death. The horses of the contemporary apocalypse carry plague, eco-catastrophe, migration and neo-populism on their backs. We have historically specific names for them. We don't like to call neo-populism "fascist" for historiographically correct reasons: there are no boy scout uniforms associated

with the macho individualism of Proud Boy vigilante fashion. Plague is technically something apart from "virus". The focus on climate, admirable as it is, elides the other devastating assaults of the Great Extinction underway in the 21st century (Otto 2018). Migration is an impolite but politic term that avoids the legal repercussions of using the word "refugee", but it fails to grasp the most significant migration of our times: the migration of power.

All four contemporary apocalypses could be renamed. Many of the global economic and political crises of the late 20th and early 21st centuries will one day be placed clearly and simply as symptoms of the westward movement of hegemony, from the imperial moment of the British Isles in the 19th century to the republican moment of US hegemony in the 20th towards the command economy of China in the 21st and, waiting in the wings if *Hindutva* does not derail it, India preparing patiently for its ascent. The real crisis of migration is this drift of power and wealth. It is typical of hegemonies to blame the victims. As Jimmie Durham (1993) wrote, it wasn't First Nation Americans who scalped: it was white bounty hunters. The European Union's refusal to accept arrivals by boat (while grudgingly accepting arrivals by plane) is victim-blaming that ignores (and declines to mitigate) the causes of migration. Fascistic neo-populism is a refusal of the cosmopolitan ideals that have for so long provided the ethical basis for global resistance and for metropolitan solidarity with decolonial struggles. The cost is withdrawal from the previous US hegemony of neoliberal globalisation. The current collapse of global trade – laid at the door of pandemic and of greed and trickery in the finance markets (as if that were unprecedented) – is a retreat towards an imagined past entrenched inside the boundaries of an ethnically defined community. It mobilises infantile fantasies of security, expressed in a resurgent patriarchy with its flags, four-wheel drives and AK47s from Arizona to Teheran, a newly unifying orthodoxy that links the outlaw chic of

US “patriots” with the machismo of the Taliban, under the guise of rebellion and liberation under the sway of billionaire warlords.

The ethnically monolithic policy priorities of Xi’s faction in the Chinese Communist Party are only another symptom of the same rejection of cosmopolis. Philosophically, Xi’s Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is in the vanguard of a postmodern, even postcolonial rejection of universalism, the ideological wing of the European Enlightenment that drove colonial expansion and the emergence of capital as a global system (Mignolo 2003). As if Germany in the 18th century poses the greatest threat to the contemporary world. Still, it is true that universalism is in crisis. As I write, the Biden administration is securing preliminary agreements from the major powers to a joint effort to rein in global warming. Planetary problems demand planetary solutions, despite the intrusive truth that not everyone has contributed to or benefitted from global warming in the same degree, while “everyone” is expected to bear their part in the effort to ameliorate its effects (Chakrabarty 2012). Ecological calamity requires common, collective, collaborative responses, but still requires us to consider difference, not the universalist claims of ethnicity and patriarchy, as the roots of cosmopolitanism (Papastergiadis 2012). The saddest assessment of ecopolitics is that, as with colonisation, the worst has already happened; what was dreamed of as an event has become an ongoing catastrophe, and we already live in the end times after the apocalypse. Migration of wealth, like the migrations of the poor, is always hopeful, always looking for the next thing and the next. In the opposite temporal direction, retrenchment into ethnic enclaves, even if they are continental in scale as here in Australia, sees the past as redemptive, although its nostalgia is always tinged with the doubt that the worst has already occurred, that miscegenation has already infected Islamic, Aryan or Han purity. The true enemy of ethno-fascist neo-nationalism is not the Outsider but the traitor within, the deceit curled up in the heart of the purest of the pure, the self-doubt that at the last they might discover sympathy in

their inmost gizzards. This is the ground of those deathly if risible displays of unrestrained, foaming anger that gun fanatics of all religious persuasions allow themselves, and that their political and economic masters foster at every turn.

Where ethno-fascism is locked in the past, and hegemonic migration in an imaginary future, eco-catastrophe thinking is trapped in a present it can't get out of. Its vice is fatalism. Mortality used to be the condition of individuals. Now we face it as a social, even planetary event. The temptation to a fatalist descent into melancholy contemplation has rarely seemed so tempting, not since "midnight in the century" (Serge 2014) that preceded this one. Ironically, that very fatalism is what makes ecopolitics the only genuinely political agent in the modern apocalypse. However deeply they seek renewal and movement, however much they mine the future for profit in the form of debt, modern hegemonies have no goal beyond maintaining the current state of the world. Taking a greater share for a different polity, a different kleptocracy, does not change the pile of suffering and exploitation to be shared out: that remains always the ground hegemonies stand on. But they can mobilise desire for change, the hope that springs eternal, the unanswerable human desire which is always for what we do not (yet) possess and is therefore endless. Shaping that desire to the requirements of the hegemony is crucial. The British Empire did it with jingoism; the US hegemony with consumerism; from a distance it seems as if Xi's CCP is offering security as the goal. Taming desire, deflecting and disciplining needs, as Foucault (2007) might have said and Arendt (1958) did, modern politics has turned away from the public debate over what constitutes the good life in common and reduced it to the management of biological needs. The future is the illusion that makes the present administrable. For catastrophe environmentalism the opposite is the case: the absence of any future removes all obligation to be concerned with even the biological survival of the species. It is not uncommon to hear broadly Green people say that the pandemic is a good thing when it reduces atmospheric and sonic pollution, and to

whisper, if only to ourselves that it would not be so ill if Corona reduces the human population.

The pandemic must be understood in these terms. The wet markets of Wuhan can stand as emblems, and as sacrificial or ideological pictures of everything we fear most. It speaks of the contagion of autonomous humans by a repressed and savage Nature through the unnatural assertion of biology (foodstuffs) over prohibition (the marker of humanity). It lies at a frontier between ethnicities and religions where the certainties of identity are most at risk, and enters through the kitchen, women's domain, where the prized heterosexuality of the patriarch is most at risk of pollution by the very women it has trained itself to desire, despise, sanctify and oppress. And as the very idea of pandemic belongs to the movements of people, so we have learned to dread festivals and holidays, not for concentrating crowds but for allowing them to scatter across states and climate zones, a nomadic cosmopolis of contagion.

Anti-cosmopolis and the neo-consensus

Private health is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, a categorial error. I cannot be healthy if my neighbours and my environment are unhealthy. But neither neo-liberal globalizers nor neo-nationalist border-builders – effectively consensual antagonists who only disagree on the levels at which goods, services or people have the power to move – can confront the obvious contradiction in "private health". They cannot criticise it because to do so they would have to contradict the profit motive as such, and the principle of individualism it depends upon. The neo-consensus is therefore prepared to contemplate a global and even colour-blind, even class-blind pandemic as a price worth paying to maintain the profit motive. Of course, it can export risk: to ex-colonial UberEats delivery riders, hospital cleaners, and the even more invisible workers of "internet" shopping whose logistical labour in warehouses and postal

delivery the rhetoric disguises as imaginary robotic systems. In effect this is all too accurate a description of their situation seen from the point of view of the deracinated consumers who nonetheless, in all bad faith, know perfectly well that there is an oppressed and exploited manikin inside the Mechanical Turk.

The casualties – exceeding five and a half million at time of writing – are an acceptable price for the cyborg corporations that buy and sell governments. We know these corporations are cyborgs, not because no human would ever make decisions like this, but because any living creature displays an instinct for survival, while these corporations, vast aggregations of computers with human bio-implants, are obviously prepared to destroy not only humans, not only the planet, but the future sources of their wealth in order to secure present profits. More than any living thing, most of whom know how to nest in order to procreate, the cyborg corporation is capable of acting out an in-built performance imperative to make profit regardless of any other motive, including its own survival. The perversion of the neo-consensus is to place itself in service to this Moloch. Thus the neo-consensus opens borders to goods and finance but pretends to close them to people, while in the event filtering people according to the amount of profit that can be derived from them, in cash or as data. The *Evergreen* Suez Canal blockage only revealed that live animal exports travel more freely than people, including the sailors now trapped aboard the ship. Matteo Salvini, Italian Minister of the Interior, is arraigned for refusing to allow boat-borne migrants to land: he has never been accused of stopping cattle coming into harbour.

Private health makes pandemic the responsibility of individuals. We are counselled to contact trace, wear masks, get vaccinated and socially distance (another powerful oxymoron). Not surprisingly, the success of the individualist ideology among neo-nationalists leads them to refuse these responsibilities. The rest of us look on aghast at their irresponsibility and the irresponsibility of their spokesmen (and they are almost exclusively men: Putin, Bolsonaro,

Trump …). The parallel with "sustainable" capitalism is striking in its dependence on "responsible consumers". This is not responsibility in the sense of reciprocity of the kind observed in indigenous cultures where everything taken from the land or sea must be respected, and in some way returned. Individualised consumer responsibility is instead a matter of filing, a filing of matter, sorting the integral waste that capital cannot persist without, in ways that make further exploitation possible, that offers a kind of gratification through the imitation of work and a depiction of connection (rather than its reality); and that furthers the real subsumption of consumer discipline into the profit-making obsession of cyborg capital. "Responsible consumerism" imitates liberalism's strategy of apologising after the event for its worst excesses, its genocides and ecocides, with the excuse that ecocide and genocide, like waste, are exceptions and accidents, whereas in fact the exception is the very core of liberal (and we should add illiberal, command-led) capital (Povinelli 2018).

Responsibility is a matter of response, which in our time has been reduced to a measure of feedback, the guarantee of the efficiency of a communication system. Consuming has been wholly subsumed ("real subsumption" in Marx's terminology) into such a communicative loop, where purchase is incomplete without the return of data to the corporations involved in the sourcing, manufacture and logistics feeding the once-terminal moment of purchase. Now recycling proves to us the incompletion of that moment, and the extension of discipline from the demographic probability that you will purchase according to your age, gender, income and ethnicity towards the new individualist demographics collected by data harvesting in social media, loyalty cards, credit cards … The mass societies of Fordism gave way to household consumption, then in the postmodern moment to individual consumption. Now we enter a moment when the most advanced economies track not individuals but behaviours – swipes, clicks, likes. In this movement, we have passed from the age of probabilities to the age of contingency. Data capture no longer seeks pattern and

prediction: it seeks randomness. Humans are the last source of such profitable instability. Our last work, as fully integrated consumers, is to be lucky.

The scales of luck are far smaller than the mass consumerism of Model T Fords. They are far smaller than the vast movements of capital and hegemony, but like the molecules that make up the great ocean currents, at their own scale of operation they make a difference. And difference is the only possible motor for a direction out of the dystopian present.

A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night

Ana Lily Amirpour's 2015 film *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* predates the pandemic by five years but offers some ways of thinking it. Like all vampire movies it evokes blood as a medium, unsettles the connotations of menstruation and thus of femininity as lunar and reproductive, thus proximal to nature. The gender-switch – Amirpour's vampire is female – already breaks the code: the Girl (unnamed throughout the film) is un-natural. Beyond the obvious allegories – perfect in their ambiguity – there lies the challenge of the film's ending and of the role of one of its principal characters. The plot is a love story and ends as the young male character Arash and the Girl drive away from Bad City, the petroleum-powerhouse town they inhabit and that inhabits them, shot in chiaroscuro black and white in another petrol-economy town in Southern California, a diasporan doppelganger that displaces the Farsi dialogue with evocations of American youth culture (US rock among the Farsi songs on the soundtrack, Arash in James Dean clothes and poses, his US classic convertible, and in a marvellous sequence the Girl skateboarding in chador). After driving for a while, they park up. Arash gets out. He seems to be making some kind of decision. He gets back into the car and drives. The final shot shows taillights receding. But which way are they going – escaping the city or returning to it?

The love story involves a boy and the Girl, but elsewhere the film plays with all the roles. With flamboyant make-up, Arash dances with the Girl at a costume party dressed as Dracula; earlier she has been treated to a would-be erotic dance by a pimp who she bites and kills. In another unexplained insert sequence, a trans character we have been introduced to briefly as a streetwalker controlled by the now-dead pimp dances alone on a rooftop with a helium balloon for partner. This mirror of the pimp's attempted, assertive, almost bullying seduction routine is far more joyous, celebratory, and asexual, as the core love story also appears to be. The play of roles, genders, sexes and asexualities elevates the movie from realist narrative towards some kind of symbolism. But of what? Perhaps the question is best asked of the rooftop trans dance, and another sequence of the Girl dancing alone: who is watching? In many films the answer, as André Gaudreault (2009) descries it in early cinema, would be "the cinema", what he calls "*le grand monstrateur*", the great showman, the One that shows us the events on screen. But *A Girl Walks Home* presents an alternative.

In the opening scene, Arash collects a feral cat from the outskirts of town. The cat accompanies him through the story, often caught in close up, watching events unfold. At moments it enters into the plot, first being sexed by the pimp (who calls it Mr Cat), later threatened by Arash's junkie father who accuses it of "having your mother's eyes" – another gender uncertainty. The cat is a cat, as real as any of the actors. In sequences in the car, where it perches between Arash and the Girl, it seems to follow the alternating lines of dialogue, turning its head towards each speaker, perhaps a trained animal, an actor, but no less a cat than Arash is less a man for being an actor. At the same time, obscurely, and in ways I have yet to find a satisfying resolution to, it seems to have some other function, specifically to watch, to witness, to see. It is a principle of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) late phenomenology that in order to see, we make some kind of compact with the world that admits that we must also be seen, inscribed in the field of the visible. The cat then operates in the film as the world's

view of the action, an inhuman gaze beyond the suturing of male desire into the order of continuity editing (Mulvey 1975), even as the turns of its head suggest a classical shot-reverse-shot structure that, however, replaces the implicit masculinity of the *grand monstrateur* with a feline look, dispassionate, almost objective except that it is too an object of the camera's gaze and therefore not free to be the impartial frame that actions and objects take their places in.

The grounding ambiguity, the non-identity of the cat (simultaneously cat, symbol, observer, actor, function of the film, emblem of the world that sees rooftop dances and automobile romances, impartial but at risk at least twice in the narrative …) undermines any ordinary reading of *A Girl Walks Home Alone*. Rippling between the anthropomorphisms (Mr Cat, mother) and animal embodiment, between feral and domesticated, between subject and object of the film's partition of looking, the cat is an unsettled and unsettling presence of un-nature, an absence of either nature (dispelled from Bad City) or reason (or why would it matter if a cat sees anything?). The cat that persists throughout the movie is, rather precisely, nothing. A mote in the eye, a patch of invisibility in the omnivoyant world of cinema.

The film was shot – and most frequently shown, in the age of DCP (digital content package) projection, optical discs and streaming media – digitally. A line in Godard's *Le petit soldat* (1963) echoes through the history of analog cinema: "Photography is truth. Film is truth twenty-four times a second". Almost certainly he wanted to say something about the presence of the image, either as witness to what it observes, or in the sense of a truth-statement a form of language capable of proving that some state of affairs is or was indeed the case. But there is another way to read this: "twenty-four times a second" the shutter comes down, in the camera and the projector, to hide the film transport mechanism. Nothing appears on screen. And what is nothing? For Frege (1884), as for Aristotle, everything that exists is identical to itself: this cup is this cup, not that cup or that tree. What then is zero,

which by definition does not exist? It is the name of the non-identical. The darkness we plunge into, and during which we are, again in the full technical senses of the word, unconscious, is this zero: the integral non-identity of successive frames that their presence as images emerges from. The multiple non-identities of the cat may as well serve as on-screen personification (animation) of this precisely invisible generation.

Except that this is not film in the sense Godard spoke of in 1963, long before he moved to video. This is video, where there is no shutter. Instead, each frame is scanned, from top left to bottom right, the screen illuminating as the program instructs it to, and fading just slowly enough to maintain the optical illusion of a whole image, but swiftly enough to clear the way for the next image to emerge. In video, unlike film, there is never a whole image. But equally there is never a complete darkness, only this pulse of emerging and fading. This rhythmic infrastructure, which only operates on the condition of being invisible to human eyes (but which cats can see, hence their general lack of interest in screens) tells us something odd about the digital image (equally true of stills, which are also scanned repeatedly): there is neither presence nor absence, no zero and no one, in digital media. We piously tell ourselves that the truth of video is not what it pictures but the code running beneath it, the really real code. In this way digital video seems both an even more truthful medium – it rigidly portrays itself as medium, in the modernist sense (Greenberg 1960) – speaking of an even more fundamental ontology of flux and difference, but only by rescuing itself from being anything more than a statement about statements, by withdrawing from the world into an aesthetic autonomy. Yet we know this is impossible: we know that it depends on code from somewhere, administered by global standards for image transport, running on some kind of device, made from materials fabricated in some plant, of metals and plastics transported, refined and managed, derived from some mineral resource … And we recognise the activities involved: actors human and non-human, locations, lights, microphones, production crew,

props … The ontologically subjunctive form of video, never wholly present or absent, echoes the untruth, the subjunctive "might", the quantum uncertainty of electrical charge, which can never decline to zero, and never achieve completion. The language of zeroes and ones is a fiction. The cat in *A Girl Walks Home* looks less like a Persian cat and more like Schrödinger's.

This is the scale of difference: between one image and the next, between one form of unconsciousness and the next. For the viewer, watching *Casablanca* on film or video makes no difference *because we are unconscious* for a suspiciously large proportion of the movie's running time. But we are no longer unconscious in the same way: not plunged in non-identity, but swept into the rhythm of an electronic pulse. Losing analog cinema's absences, its non-identity, we enter another space where image and darkness are no longer fundamentally separate states. Appearing and disappearing are our ontology. We are no longer inscribed into the visible: we are constantly being marked as visible and equally constantly being erased. Video is colonising the unconscious.

Virus

These changing states affect the apparatus and its spectators equally, so that they are increasingly indistinguishable (whence the neologism "produser" that acknowledges that we are increasingly makers as well as viewers, and that the two activities are decreasingly distinguishable). The "we" that emerges is no longer the common identity of a mass audience. It is increasingly the cloud of micro-behaviours clustering around an internet meme, or a way of recycling. Lyle Vincent's noir cinematography invites us to watch the film as a cloud of pixels, as records of light – and all light is ultimately solar, whether daylight, fossil-fuel powered or hydroelectric – and as retinal effects. The collaborative nature of film

– capture, processing, storage, transmission, viewing responding – restores response to a contingency to which otherwise economies of micro-behaviour condemn us.

The pandemic, like hegemonic power's nomadic geography, like global warming and pollution, like the increasingly logistical logic of the neo-consensus (Mezzadro and Neilson 2013, Rossiter 2016, Tsing 2009), like coloniality and like capital, is unevenly shared. We are not all in this together: we are in it apart, from the macro-scale of polity and poverty to the granular intricacies of behaviours and unconsciousness. These scales are not only spatial. They involve the engineering of new temporealities – new operations from the geological time of the Anthropocene to the microHerz frequencies of computer clocks. Equally they deploy new political administrations, temporamentalities (by analogy with *mentalités* and Foucault's governmentality) that mange the specific difference of becoming human in the displacement of circadian rhythms by vaster and smaller timescapes of risk, hope, desire, security and fatalism.

Pandemic management employs both temporealities and temporamentalities. The statistical figures we scan so anxiously, tables and graphs of infection rates and the geographic information systems articulating organised panic with migration and mutation, are all devices honed in the heyday of empires when ecology and climate science were invented (Coen 2018) alongside anthropology and the ethno-sciences that mined indigenous knowledge for the metropolitan centres. Temporeal technologies and their temporamental deployment (for example the delay applied to financial data, absurdly high-priced in what passes for real time, freely disseminated at the end of the trading day) introduce another dialectic of scalar inequalities. On one side the temptation was for the new planetary sciences to be fully assimilated into the maw of capital as intellectual property, in exactly the same way as physical materials. On the other was Science, the imagined community of scholars and the equally imaginary body of knowledge, far greater and more detailed than any one

mind might cram into a lifetime. The oscillation between these poles, between commodification and commons, plays out still in the government of Covid-19. Vaccine as saviour is the current trope at time of writing, but already some of the leading tropes of 2020 sound like historical relics ("the new normal", "flattening the curve"). It has the classic form: the communal will to understand that no-one is safe til everyone is safe versus the right of inventors to make a profit from their knowledge. The enclosures that began with the commons in Europe and became a planetary policy in the wake of Columbus (Milun 2011) have bled into the assumed right to extract knowledge of the illness from its unpaid victims in order to manufacture products that can be sold to them. Colonialism no longer stops at the epidermis, and the colonisation of the unconscious is only one step from the extraction of language, and one step before the extraction of viral RNA.

As Gary Nabhan (1997, 21) has it, "whatever we can read about biodiversity will be written in less than 5 percent of the languages that have existed since Gutenberg's print revolution", a truth that extends to knowledge about the coronavirus and its technical and commercial applications. It is not a question of discovering a counter-knowledge: that too would only be captured and deployed by omnivorous colonial capitalism. It is a question of creating conditions for an Other way of knowing, and we have models. The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, but once it is dismantled, there's little reason to throw them out. Instead we – a "we" that on the model of cinema now includes humans, technologies and ecologies – will seek out new affordances of the old tools, new hybridities, Créole epistemologies.

This "we" has never existed before, and only exists now as potential: in the ideal of science, however often betrayed, in the ideal of cinema, however often monetised, in the dream of cosmopolis that now outgrows the limits of a single species, but equally learns from the dialectic of time/space scales to think and act not just globally and locally but cosmically

and microscopically. The noisy, neoromantic soundtrack to Amirpour's *A Girl Walks* gives way from time to time to the surface noise of a needle running over the vinyl groove towards the music. It carries with it John Cage's experiments, inspired by the *I Ching*, in the anechoic chamber, where in pursuit of silence he discovered his body as involuntary sound-source, and subsequently, in *4'33"* made the world's sounding the simultaneous object and subject of a listening as omnipresent and undefined as *Girl*'s cat. The colonial experience is that silence is an enforced condition; carnival its appropriate force of resistance. The data visualisations, animations and diagrams that picture and communicate the virus are also silent. Silence, in Amirpour's film, in the postcolony (Mbembe 2001) and in pandemic crisis management, is never complete, nor is it coherent. Like digital video, it fails the tests of absence and presence, not least through the familiar repression of the natural body's capabilities for making and hearing sound (soles of the feet, long bones and chest cavity as receptors; intestines, lungs and nervous system as generators). The virus is as silent as regimes of pandemic management make it. The silence of catastrophe has too often been the silencing of its occurrence (only to be alluded to as exception to the harmony of the invisible hand sweeping the strings of the human exception).

The actuality of silence, as Amirpour deciphers it in the record player's surface noise, is noise, the unwanted exterior of organised sound, the ejected waste of efficient communication. Admittedly neo-populism has embraced anarchist libertarianism (Malcolm McLaren's punk slogan "Cash from chaos") from Amazonia to Kashmir as much as it has ramped up even as it occludes its totalitarian extension into dreams and cellular metabolism. The Cage analogy is illuminating once more: Cage (1968) offered four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence, in three movements, thus organising the contingent clatter of the world for the system of music. Capital's assimilation of contingency is as source of profit parallels the political espousal of anarchy as the extreme form of liberalism. It organises

noise into a tool for communication: the efficient extraction of data from the flux. Virus is not its enemy but a savage contingency, precisely the kind of emergency that disaster capitalism wallows in. Humans are vulnerable to the extent that we have silenced the nature that we defined by leaving it, that we despised, gendered, ethnicized and ultimately wrecked and abandoned. Nature's revenge is that human populations are the environment the virus inhabits, economic and political externalities to be exploited without end or consequence. Yet as we become environments, we have the opportunity to overcome our alienation from the world. Our one hope is to learn to observe ourselves, hear our world in ourselves in all the alienated ruin of our historical rifts, from elsewhere: a view from the feline camera, a ruffling of silence from the rumble of a record deck. We must not and in all probability cannot steal cosmopolis back from indigenous peoples who alone seem to possess its secrets today. We can however learn from them the skills of enduring after the end of the world.

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