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Algorithms, Necropolitics, and the Ethics of the Passerby. With Achille Mbembe after the Exit from Democracy

Abstract: Using terms specific to Achille Mbembe's thought – especially the concepts of *necropolitics, brutalism,* and *earthly community* – my analysis brings together political philosophy, ecology, technology, anthropology, and metaphysics. Thus, it creates fertile ground for a new type of discourse, one that outlines a planetary mode of thinking: from the premise of an existential and ecological crisis towards the need for a conceptual mutation, with technology as a paradoxical partner, and finally towards language and corporality as the ultimate resources for regeneration. It also highlights the "ethics of the passerby" and the constellation of terms related to it: the universal hospitality, the era of the earth, symbiosis, and the politics of a planetary age.

Keywords: Achille Mbembe; Necropolitics; Brutalism; Earthly Community; Ethics of the Passerby; Exit from Democracy; Digital Age.

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1. Information Networks. *Nexus*, the Witch Hunt, and the Algorithms of the Digital Age

Between October 16th and 19th, 2024, I attended the congress of the *International Center for the Study of the Imaginary (CRI2I)*, entitled *Technoscientific Imaginaries. Narratives, Power, Society,* which took place in Como and Milan. The event included in-depth discussions about the multiple implications of the new planetary seduction – artificial intelligence – as well as the way it is shaped by old power structures. Caught between opposing forecasts – the claim that "there is nothing new under the sun" and the tendency to imagine a possible extinction of the human species, resulting from the renunciation of autonomy in favor of decision-making algorithms – the congress reopened several questions that I found in Yuval Noah Harari's volume *Nexus. A Brief History of Information from the Stone Age to AI*[1].

These images surfaced also in the documentary *Au–delà du papier* by Oana Suteu Khintirian (2021)[2], a Canadian filmmaker of Romanian origin, who settled in Montreal

with her family in 1995. The film moves between two generations, the parents' and the son's. The former were ready to sacrifice themselves to defend the Central University Library in Bucharest, burned during the tragic events of December 1989; the latter faces what is called the "digital shift", implemented by the educational institution where he studies, in Montreal. Having emigrated to Canada in the 1990s, the filmmaker's family left everything behind, taking with them impressive quantities of "paper", specifically the love correspondence between the filmmaker's grandparents during their engagement. What is most intriguing, however, is the fact that the author's son struggles to decipher the correspondence between his two ancestors, a fact that sends his mother on a long journey, in an attempt to recover the written culture and the ways in which, through it, information, transmission, and survival – in various corners of the world – left their traces.

More importantly, it leads to the questions that arise nowadays, when intergenerational transmission is happening on new platforms – probably the most significant mutation in the history of information since the emergence of the Gutenberg Galaxy. To this end, she embarks on a journey into the past, to Mauritania, to the Chinguetti Library, which houses written evidence related to a heliocentric conception of the universe, dating back two centuries before the Copernican Revolution in the West. However, the library is threatened by being buried under sand, by people's inability to properly manage its archives, and even by the insatiable appetite of goats, which undisturbedly chew through cellulose. Books become organic matter, lost in the sand.

Starting from the film's central question – whether the mode of transmission that paper has ensured until now can be continued on new platforms – as well as from the dual inquiry raised at the aforementioned congress – whether new generations are still willing to defend their freedom or would rather choose the algorithms of the network, I will examine a few key concepts found in Harari's *Nexus*, namely: the difference between intelligence and consciousness; the naive belief that the accumulation of information necessarily leads to truth, and finally the historical tension between truth and order. I would also add to this the observations made by researcher Alessandra Bracci during the *Technoscientific Imaginaries* colloquium, in her presentation entitled "From the Tyranny of Technology to the Freedom of Consciousness", where she highlights the specific role and processes of imagination in the world of algorithms. The researcher distinguishes between rational thinking, based on linear cause-effect logic, and creative thinking, based on analogy, capable of recovering the fractures left unexplained by the former. Creative thinking is also governed by intuition and symbols, which connect the seemingly divergent threads of reality within a multidimensional space.

Within this framework, the **d**isruptive effect of new technologies (more precisely artificial intelligence) forces us to deconstruct common perceptions and understandings of what the human species represents today. We must free ourselves from the seduction of reductionist patterns (the human being as a machine, a mechanism) and adopt a complex mode of thinking – one based

on the fallibility of models, self-correct-ing mechanisms, doubt, contradiction, and open-ended reasoning, capable of multiplying connections. This "nexus" re-lies on a spectrum that extends beyond the rational self, toward the infrared zone of somatic processes and the ultraviolet zone of archetypal imagery. Starting from this perspective, I would like to discuss, in what follows, the arguments of *Nexus*, and espe-cially the solutions it proposes, considering the current mode of information propaga-tion in the age of artificial intelligence.

The central idea brought into discus-sion is the large-scale management of infor-mation, as well as the intersubjective reali-ties that this management creates. On one hand, mythological symbols, and on the other, the governance of populations and territories, pertain to ways of managing this intersubjective reality – respectively through fictions and complex systems of storage al-gorithms. However, while our memory is not designed to easily retain accounting or financial data, it retains information more effectively when conveyed through stories. It seems that, from the very beginning, we have decoded and remembered the world through storytelling. *The Ramayana*, for example – a book of 24,000 verses, central to Hindu wisdom – was memorized and passed down from generation to generation.

The naive interpretation of infor-mation, criticized by reviewers from The Guardian[3], assumes that its accumula-tion necessarily leads to truth. But upon closer examination, Harari writes, par-adigm shifts in information have led not only to major scientific breakthroughs, but also to the rise of religious fanaticism, ma-nipulation, false prophets, and pseudosci-ence – all of which have gained increasing

influence. Over time, fundamental muta-tions have led to different ways of manag-ing information, with humans always driv-en by the pathos of infallibility – the desire to overcome biological and perceptual lim-itations of our species. At this point, Harari makes a statement that is highly debatable, yet contains an intuitive insight at the level of intentionality or aspiration: the illusion of overcoming fallibility lies at the heart of both religious pursuit and the human fascination with artificial intelligence[4]. The latter, like the former, involves the search for an infallible superhuman source.

But the problem arises when human intermediaries are still needed to access this supposedly superhuman source. The key question becomes: Is it possible to remove the source of error – that is, human relativ-ity – from the equation altogether? After all, certain questions persist: Who decides the criteria for wisdom? Based on what? Can these criteria generate consensus that withstands the test of time? Rather than removing fallibility, however, the result has often been the opposite: the search for in-fallible texts and narratives has led to in-creasingly oppressive sources of truth. If we were naive, we might believe that by lib-eralizing sources of information, we could escape monopolizing power – but this is not what reality shows.

One of the most compelling exam-ples Harari brings, beyond how democra-cies and totalitarian regimes each decode the information game, is that one of the most terrifying events in European histo-ry – the witch hunts that took place be-tween the 14th and 17th centuries—was, from the perspective of information cir-culation, a thoroughly modern phenom-enon[5]. When viewed through the lens of

the manner information changes power networks and dominant fictions, an idea clearly stands out: the Gutenberg Galaxy did not lead exclusively to the scientific revolution, but also to fake news, conspiracy theories, and to the "infamous" *Malleus Maleficarum. The Hammer of Witches* by Heinrich Kramer (1485). Filled with descriptions of demonic sins, unspeakable orgies, and images no one had actually witnessed, it became the basis for accusations that led to the execution of 40,000–50,000 innocent people in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In other words, witchcraft became an intersubjective reality. This suggests that humanity is capable of creating, alongside "real" memories, false memories as well. Equally telling is the fact that while this toxic information spread like wildfire – reaching 8 editions by 1500, five more by 1520, and sixteen more by 1670[6] – Copernicus' book, *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* (1543), had only 400 printed copies. As a conclusion, the scientific revolution was not exclusively initiated by the printing revolution, nor by the democratization of the free information market, but also by a new approach to human fallibility – what Harari calls the "discovery of ignorance"[7]. This includes self-corrective mechanisms – what we might more simply call discernment: systems that test truth rather than institutions that hoard power.

Unable to summarize the entirety of Harari's argument – from the Stone Age to the Computer Era (a major criticism of his work being this very ambition to cover such vastly different epochs via the revolutions of information, intersubjective realities, and fiction-induced fake memories) – I will mention here just another central

point of his argument: namely, the way we confuse intelligence with consciousness, naively believing that decision-making and generation of original ideas are inherently traits of consciousness[8]. This assumption does not necessarily hold true in the "non-organic network" we are preparing to enter – one where we may be surprised by how life will look when algorithms make decisions on behalf of but against democracy, inventing new mythologies and powerful non-human agents. If intelligence is what we might call instrumental, calculating reason – the ability to achieve given goals (like maximizing user engagement on a media platform) – then consciousness is the ability to experience a wide range of emotions, such as pain, pleasure, love, and hate, in relation to those "intelligent" decisions[9].

This brings us back again to discernment, especially since Harari makes reference to a Facebook campaign in Myanmar (2017) that exponentially amplified hatred. Without the function of consciousness, algorithms generate new political structures, new economic models, and new cultural norms. We return, therefore, to the beginning: the problem doesn't lie in human nature, doomed to self-destruction, but in how we manage information networks. The conclusion is that the complexity of the future will thus not come from miraculous new technologies or from discovering original ideas that escaped all previous generations, but rather from abandoning both naive and populist takes on information, as well as from giving up the fantasy of infallibility – the illusion that some supernatural force might one day absolve us of the limitations inherent to the human condition.

2. Mutations in Technological Plasticity: Reflections on Achille Mbembe's Political Thought

Achille Mbembe's book *La communauté terrestre*[10] speaks directly to this complex problem. It is no novelty that humanity must search for new conditions of survival, new forms of hybridization, and new paradigms of thought, given the mutation in the management of information mentioned beforehand. Mbembe has already characterized this extreme condition in which humanity currently finds itself, when the possibility of extinction looms increasingly on the horizon, in memorable terms: the possibility of transforming the entire human race into a grim necropolis (the term *necropolitics*), or – in his concept of *brutalism* – the way extreme extractive capitalism treats the planet as a resource to be exploited down to its very last fiber[11]. Resorting to the humanist solution of a defeatist, bitter, or nihilistic discourse seems the easiest stratagem – already culturally validated by great Western traditions of nihilism. Counterposed to this is the solution of blind optimism or the baseless stigmatization of the current situation. The new language Mbembe seeks – already from his 2016 work *Politiques de l'inimitié*[12] – should be capable of "saving life from the disaster that awaits us. Each fragment of this terrestrial language will be rooted in the paradoxes of the body, flesh, skin and nerves"[13].

This mutation, it seems, cannot be carried out outside of technology. After all, *techné* has never been the regime of mere instrumentality or pragmatism. Technology has always had a constitutive fabulatory dimension, as well as political prestige. Yet, our age is marked by paradoxes from which we must extract the material for reflection on the future: first, the question of technology as a force of becoming is increasingly split from the political interrogation of the meaning of that becoming. Instrumental reason has thus been freed from the weight of meaning[14]. In this way, "technology tends to become a second body of the Earth – a thermal machine"[15]. Moreover, it increasingly absorbs the attributes of religious, magical, or animistic thinking, as well as of the aesthetic. Becoming a kind of last universal religion, it simultaneously drains the symbolic reserves of those traditions – replacing the word with gesture and artificial organs, reason with *techné*, meaning with image. It is highly probable, Mbembe writes explicitly, that the epochal event of our time remains "the exhaustion of the history of the word"[16].

At the center of this metamorphosis, then, would be the conscious realization that this terrestrial community – *the last utopia*, as Mbembe calls it – can only be reconditioned by reformatting our modes of relating to Earth. Such a relationship can no longer be the centuries-old mode of exploitation and appropriation; it must become one of awareness of transience and non-permanence. The phrase may seem metaphorical, but the metaphor is turning into urgency – due to escalating environmental toxicity, viral infections, pandemics, and repeated contaminations – based on stark reality rather than theoretical observation: if we still want to breathe (as the air we inhale becomes increasingly filled with dust, toxic gases, harmful substances, granulations, and emissions of all kinds), our planetary mode of relation must change. In short, we must shift our paradigms of

thought and action. Consequently, we can no longer imagine the future within the confines of old thinking paradigms.

The transition toward this new paradigm is not a Promethean passage – akin to the incandescent fire-bound emergence of the first civilizational paradigm, which signified a total delinking, a kind of escape from earthly prison. The first human scene was a mythological space where the word and its symbolic power were paramount. A world of clay, soil, and limestone, infused with symbolic force. What, then, does this new Earth – transformed by contemporary computing technologies, algorithms, and dematerialized images, a symbiosis between the biosphere and the technosphere – look like? It would, first of all, replace the obsessive idea of escape – of fleeing, eluding and liberating from the mundane prison, of extreme artificialization. Instead of imaginatively populating an impossible planet Mars, the essential question should be how to repopulate, rematerialize and restore the capacity of habitation to the terrestrial community.

This reanimation is far from being facile – for, given the ambiguous status of technology, it is always exposed to a paradox: the human adventure on Earth is equally symbolic and technological:

> The production, reception, and arrangement of the living will each time necessitate the destruction of that very living. This contradictory and Herculean movement will require the deployment of gargantuan, nearly atomic forces, and colossal energies – simultaneously with their dissipation. Technology will have been both the instrument and the stage of this tragedy[17].

3. Borders, Islands, and the Computational Logic

I would like to further develop my reflection on computational logic and artificial intelligence with an analysis inspired by Achille Mbembe's volume *Necropolitics*, since it presents the conjunctions that lead to certain inextricable paradoxes—namely, democracy based on the exploitation of bodily force transformed into an energy of exchange. The culmination of this process is total war, anticipated by the calculating reason, tied to technology understood as an instrument of planetary appropriation[18]. Using terms specific to Achille Mbembe's thought – especially the concepts of *necropolitics*, *brutalism*, and *earthly community* – my analysis creates a path for a planetary mode of thinking: from the premise of an existential and ecological crisis, toward the need for a conceptual mutation, with technology as a *pharmakon*, and finally, toward language and corporality as sources of regeneration.

In order to unravel the logic of this entangled "viscerality", we should understand its double bind – like a domain of radiation that becomes either a source of dispersion and death or a source of transmission[19]. Technology has now become a second shell, an intrinsic logic, a way through which the human being has inserted itself into the world, has profoundly transformed it, and now has become a paradoxical trap. Heidegger's reflections in *The Question Concerning Technology* revolve around the way in which the human being could maintain a relationship of freedom with it: Heidegger insists that from our relationship with technology, a new way of dwelling on Earth was born

– one that belongs to the Western tradition of metaphysical thought. According to the German philosopher, this should avoid two pitfalls, creating "a space where we are neither confined to a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology or – what amounts to the same – to rebel helplessly against it and curse it as the work of the devil"[20].

Technology is now entangled with natural evolution, modeled after living bodies. The redistribution of power relations between the human and the technological is increasingly complex, yet unfortunately remains permanently based on a brutalist model of extraction and plunder. At this point, Mbembe expands Michel Foucault's theory of power relations in a different direction, transferring it from the realm of interconnectedness of surveillance and molecular power – from the network of constraints and limitations, from the space of liberal micro-power exercised within every institution (in education, religion, and state institutions) – to the metabolic and reproductive level of the planet. Here, technology leads, according to Margarida Mendes in "Molecular Colonialism" (2017), to "the transgression of planetary boundaries such as those related to anthropogenic climate change, degenerative land-use change, biodiversity loss, the creation of novel entities and genetically engineered organisms"[21], and especially to a technological singularity closely tied to eschatological and apocalyptic discourses, presupposing the extinction of the human species.

At a certain stage in human history, we engaged with the idea of life as a virtual, nonlinear, exponential, and chaotic system. On the contrary, in an era exposed to and controlled by technology, dismantled structures of information struggle to position themselves within a suffocating matrix of rules, "mostly designed for those human bodies deemed either in excess, unwanted, illegal, dispensable, or superfluous"[22]. Forms of entanglement evolve into more invasive forms of enclosure, contraction, and containment, paralleled by a "renewed production of myths, fictions, and fantasies both baroque and dystopian, immaterial formations that strive to generate their own actuality through sheer excess and stupefaction"[23].

Mbembe's view of today's world analyzes "hunts of fugitives"[24], "polymorphous war machines"[25], global mobility, global wars, "hit-and-run affairs"[26], colonial occupation, occupation in late modernity, inhumanity masked as idealism, nanoracism[27], and a "society of enmity". A clear-cut dismantling of these planetary entanglements seems almost impossible, since the network of information and "intersubjective realities" mentioned above cannot be unraveled simply through discernment or by confronting ignorance. It is always a matter of excess, of superabundance, of unchaining the figure of the Other – who could very well be one of us – since the technological depreciation of the other ultimately leads to a sinking into fake identity symbols. The era of planetary entanglements is one of continuous escalation: "These times of planetary entanglement are ripe for escalation and, consequently, for the renewed production of myths, fictions, and phantasies both baroque and dystopian, immaterial formations that strive to generate their own actuality through sheer excess and stupefaction"[28].

The game is therefore no longer played on the field of discernment, since

technology and its tentacles are inescapable. Yet, just as there is a technological chain – a nexus operating on the elimination of alterity – there are also techniques and procedures for entering into relation, which resemanticize the visceral dimension of the planetary community: "In the darkness of fear and denunciation, and faced with unrelenting waves of repression, compassionate men and women seek to awaken the sleeping fireflies of hospitality and solidarity. In the midst of an otherwise troubling anesthesia, an active minority is taking a stance"[29]. Is this minority a solution? Could it respond to the environmental crisis, to the crisis of the Other, to the crisis of relationality, to politics without desire, to total war?

In order to answer this question, we should also think about the way boundaries are being rethought – between the world of the living and the inanimate, between the human and the non-human, between destructive technology and that which is capable of dwelling. Borders as zones of control, or borders as spaces of delimitation and protection: "Borders. Everything begins with them, and all paths lead back to them. They are no longer merely a line of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly, they are the names used to describe the organized violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general"[30]. One of the most acute tensions within the current technological condition is that it unleashes narratives, symbolics, myths, and power networks that generate new inter-subjective realities – such as those mentioned in the first part of this text – which then become self-sustaining. Information is power. The networks of technological

information create circuits of overwhelming power. The pressing question nowadays is how to transform the networks of power toward greater freedom (through defiance, subversive affirmation, recourse to memory, playfulness, and the rejection of lethal algorithms).

Technological questions, as already noted by Heidegger, raise a radical problem, since it is possible that the boundary between security and freedom can no longer be posed in terms of democratic debates about human initiative, but rather in the domain of what Mbembe calls *Fanon's Pharmacy*[31]. As borderization spreads, the pharmakon is infused – and it is equally remedy and poison. It may well be that today we can no longer think in terms of democratic debates, in terms of decision, justice, liberty, and the protection of the vulnerable, but rather in terms of islands of solidarity, of hospitality, of the ethics of passerby, and of the pulverization of borders. Yet this is an insular thinking, like a release valve from a catastrophic situation[32]. But is this insularity enough? Technology has transformed power relations into relations of enmity, into an ordeal of the world – a force of separation rather than body-intensifying[33] – "a force of scission and real isolation that is exclusively turned upon itself and that, while pretending to ensure the world's government, seeks exemption from it"[34].

Thus, within technology lies its own predatory force – a force that is becoming increasingly insidious, creating *hollowed-out entities*[35], not only migrants, fugitives, and outcasts, but also "empty yet menacing forms in which we seek to bury the fantasies of an age terrified of itself and of its own excess"[36]:

The dream of perfect security, which requires not only complete systematic surveillance but also a policy of cleansing, is symptomatic of the structural tensions that, for decades, have accompanied our transition into a new technical system of increased automation – one that is increasingly complex yet also increasingly abstract, composed of multiple screens: digital, algorithmic, even mystical[37].

New technologies create new types of separations, new lines of demarcation, new frontiers – increasingly intimate, difficult to detect and difficult to resist:

> The technological transformation of borders is in full swing. Physical and virtual barriers of separation, digitalization of databases, filing systems, the development of new tracking services, sensors, drones, satellites and sentinel robots, infrared detectors and various other cameras, biometric controls, and new microchips containing personal details – everything is put in place to transform the very nature of the border phenomenon and to speed up the implementation of this new type of border – one that is mobile, portable, and omnipresent[38].

What Mbembe calls the exit from democracy is based on the impossibility of cohabiting with global financial capitalism and on the excess of technology. It is highly probable that we can no longer return to the paths of individual liberty, of the cult of science, technology, and reason. The question of freedom nowadays is likely tied to how we can still engage in the dismantling of borders, to their technological transformation; how we might maintain hospitality and solidarity for the expelled, and how we can do so under the broader horizon of a more comprehensive ethics of the passerby. Regarding the first point – that of the dismantling of borders through technological means – it seems that technology is the only viable tool for governing territorial trespassing and border violations. But it is also the very agent that induces anxiety, since our society is increasingly becoming one of security – a society that extirpates liberty.

Mbembe speaks of the illusion of a self-transparent humanity, recalling that in order to resist "the claim by one province of the world to a universal right of predation", we must imagine the impossible – namely, "the abolition of borders, that is to say, giving all inhabitants of the world – human and nonhuman alike – the inalienable right to freedom of movement on this planet"[39]. Although this appears to be a final utopia, based on a negative messianism[40] – a theology of the future that has reached the limits of human reason, combining technophilia and millenarianism, and even reactivating the age-old quest for immortality[41] – two directions that seem worth exploring. Both are embedded precisely within this entangled planetarity: the double bind of radiation and the ethics of the passerby.

4. Radiation as Planetary Allegory and the Ethics of the Passerby

In what follows, I will use the metaphor of radiation, which appears in the reflections of scientists, researchers in the

humanities, as well as contemporary novelists, in order to connect it with the current civilization's desire for transgression, but also with its hidden face – the planetary image of evolution and regression. Radiation carries this double meaning – it has a powerful capacity for propagation, but one that creates repercussions through its capacity for assimilation. This, in the end, is the civilizational effect, the colonial effect, the effect of conquest – whose consequence is irradiation to the point of destruction, followed by extended intergenerational effects. Mbembe here references Paul Valéry who noted: "Other parts of the world have had admirable civilizations… But no part of the world has possessed this singular physical property: the most intense power of radiation combined with an equally intense power of assimilation. Everything came to Europe, and everything came from it"[42].

In the genealogy of this term, Aimé Césaire evokes the "politics of de-civilization"[43], which involves both a diurnal side and a nocturnal one – a "chain of crimes", such as the concentration camp, but also racial policies, like those discussed by Arendt and Foucault[44]. Radiation has destroyed the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – whose traces are followed by the character in *Tasmania*, a novel by Paolo Giordano, which tells the story of a physicist turned writer, who follows in the footsteps of the great nuclear catastrophes of the twentieth century and tries to understand the deeper meaning of such events (had it not been for the clouds, another city would have been destroyed, and the relatives of the protagonist would have mourned their dead, not the other way around). Radiation is, finally, the necropolitical power of death

– our most enduring inheritance, beyond civilizational singularities:

I think again about the meeting with Tanaka-san and Moon's words – that what remains is the radiation. And it seems true to me, because the dead are also radiation. The human body is made up of billions and billions of atoms – mostly hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon, but in small concentrations you find everything: potassium, lithium, cesium, even uranium. Once the bodies are pulverized, the atoms continue to exist, and the unstable ones continue to emit radiation: alpha, beta, and gamma rays, neutrinos that pass undisturbed through matter into open space for thousands and thousands of years. That's why the dead are radiation, yes, and right now, laying my hands on the tatami, I feel as if I can sense it – the morbid pulse coming from the ground, the unleashed heat of the dead[45].

What is, however, overwhelming is the fact that this potentially destructive energy is imagined by the author as our biological-chemical inheritance, as the medium of radioactive transmission that carries the memory of Earth's inhabitants into a future time:

Lying there, I imagine a telescope being launched into orbit – one capable of detecting the radiation of the dead from a distance. The image of Earth it would provide would be very different from the one we know: no longer a dim planet, but a kind of star, radiating its own light in all directions – the light

of the atoms of those who are no more. For a long moment, I try to imagine myself among them, transformed into transparent radiation too, as I surge together with the dead beyond the edges of the solar system, among the frayed strands of forming comets[46].

Perhaps this is Fanon's pharmacy – this acute intuition, akin to the way the Greeks approached Dionysian mysteries, at least according to Nietzsche – that regeneration is intimately tied to destruction. In *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey evokes the planetary figure through the specter of militarized radiations, which bring together "the rise of ecology and the Nuclear Age"[47]. Nuclear force, radiation, is understood as a daemonic figure – in its alterity and uncanniness – one that fuses the planetary scale with the irradiation of human bodies. Light, the "fully enlightened Earth", belongs to genealogies of illumination that obscure the invisible, dark side – because genealogies of radiation follow a destructive rather than life-sustaining trajectory. While metropoles benefited from nuclear weapons testing – through innovations such as high-speed camera technology, color film, and radiotherapy – the *ir*radiation of the Pacific Islands, beginning in the 1950s, was the result of nuclear detonations by the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. These detonations "produced an atomic cartography and a militarized grammar of 'radiation atolls' and 'nuclear nomads'"[48].

Nuclear radiation, since the dawn of radioactive ecologies' longue durée, has expanded across the Earth, "carried in the bones and teeth of all subsequent generations"[49]. This planetary dimension explores what is left invisible in the uncharted territories of globalization – its daemonic function, its counter-discourse, the heritage of contamination: "If globalization is characterized by visuality and illumination, planetarity provides a means to think through that which is rendered invisible. Planetarity, in Spivak's definition, is the figure for alterity, generally read in terms such as the divine and nonhuman nature"[50]. Planetary thinking has the ability to resist the temptation to elide one of the terms of contradiction. Globalization signifies flattening, conquest, illumination, the spread of the energy of the enlightened Earth: "President Harry Truman referred to the atomic bomb as a 'harnessing of the basic power of the universe'"[51]. Planetary thinking is uncanny, it means "defiguration of the naturalization of light"[52]. In 1946, William Laurence described atomic energy as a "promise to bring the sun down to Earth as its gift to man", a promethean metaphor that spoke to a long history of the daemonic harnessing of light[53].

What Achille Mbembe searches in his book is a passage from global radiation, ordeal of the world, and necropolitical power of technology to the ethics of passerby, to Fanon's pharmacy, to a human

> who has left, quit his country, lived elsewhere, abroad, in places in which he forges an authentic dwelling, thereby trying his fate to those who welcome and recognize their own face in his, the face of a humanity to come… Becoming-human-in the-world is a question neither of birth nor of origin or race. It is a matter of journeying, of movement, and of transfiguration[54].

In order to counter the daemonic forces of radiation, contamination, brutalist exploitation, and technological extraction, Mbembe proposes "the nomos of the earth and a universal hospitality", "the symbiosis" beyond human, and a politics of a planetary age[55], relating the capacity of redressing and healing of the earthly community to Immanuel Kant's notion of hospitality as "the right that a stranger has who arrives on the soil of another to not be treated as an enemy"[56].

The conclusion of *Necropolitics* relies on a notion of transfigured "citizenship", not connected to roots, to birthplaces, to countries, and boundaries but rather to passage, to dwelling, to temporality, to journey. It does not mean, nonetheless, that Mbembe is insisting on the categories of "refugees", of perpetual migrants, exile or flight, nor on the celebration of a bohemian and rootless world, but on the "ethics of the passerby", able to counter the calculating reason, which is tied to technology understood as an instrument of planetary appropriation. In an era controlled by technology, the ethics of the passerby address *t*hose human bodies deemed in excess or superfluous. It also defies politics of enclosure, contraction, and containment by new productions of myths and fictions. The dismantling is thus a matter of excess, of unchaining the figure of the Other – who could very well be one of us.

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4. Y.N. Harari, *Nexus*, p. 91.

5. *Ibidem.*

6. *Ibidem*, p. 94.

7. *Ibidem*, p. 102.

8. *Ibidem*, p. 201.

9. *Ibidem.*

10. Achille Mbembe, *La communauté terrestre*, Paris, La Découverte, 2023.

11. *Idem*, *Brutalisme*, La Découverte, Paris, 2020.

12. Translated into English as *A. Mbembe, Necropolitics, Durham, Duke University Press, 2019.*

13. A. Mbembe, *La communauté terrestre*, p. 178-179 (trad. aut.).

14. *Ibidem*, p. 32.

15. *Ibidem*, p. 33.

16. *Ibidem*, p. 34.

17. *Ibidem*, p. 91 (trad. aut.).

18. See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. and with an introduction by William Lovitt, New York and London, Garland, 1977.

19. In this respect, see the novel *Tasmania* by Paolo Giordano.

20. M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 25–26, apud Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 94.

21. M. Mendes, "Molecular Colonialism", in M. Mendes (ed.), *Matter Fictions*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2017, apud A. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 95.

22. *Ibidem*, p. 96.

23. *Ibidem*, p. 97.

24. *Ibidem*, p. 96.

25. *Ibidem*, p. 85.

26. *Ibidem*, p. 83.

27. *Ibidem*, p. 57.

28. Marc Goodman, *Future Crimes: Everything is Connected, Everyone is Vulnerable and What We Can Do About It*, New York, Doubleday, 2015); Benjamin Wittes and Gabriella Blum, *The Future of Violence: Robots and Germs, Hackers and Drones – Confronting a New Age of Threat*, Basic Books, New York, 2015, apud A. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 97.

29. A. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 97.

30. *Ibidem*, p. 99.

31. *Ibidem*, p. 117: The central idea of the reflection on necropolitics is that in an era whose logic is war, poison and remedy are deeply interconnected, and the benefits of technology can also bring about major terrestrial destructions. Thus, starting from the Platonic concept of *pharmakon* (the idea

of a medication that acts simultaneously as remedy and poison), Mbembe coins the term *Fanon's Pharmacy*: "Frantz Fanon's political and psychiatric work forms part of the basis for my showing how, in the wake of decolonization, war (in the figure of conquest and occupation, of terror and counterinsurgency) has become the sacrament of our times, at this, the turn of the twenty-first century" (*Necropolitics*, p. 2).

32. At the end of my argument, I will bring into discussion Paolo Giordano's novel *Tasmania*, which imagines this insular projection in the face of extinction: "Tasmania. It's far enough south to avoid extreme temperatures. It has good reserves of freshwater, it's in a democratic state, and it harbors no natural predators of humans. It's not too small, but it is, after all, an island, therefore easier to defend. Because, please believe me, there will be need for defense." (P. Giordano, p. 119, trad. aut.).

33. A. Mbembe, Introduction, *The Ordeal of the World*, in *Necropolitics*, p. 1.

34. *Ibidem.*

35. *Ibidem*, p. 101.

36. *Ibidem.*

37. *Ibidem*, p. 102.

38. *Ibidem*, p. 101.

39. *Ibidem,* p. 104.

40. *Ibidem*, p. 105.

41. *Ibidem.*

42. Mbembe about *Fanon's Pharmacy*, in *Necropolitics*, p. 122.

43. Mbembe about Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2000. *Necropolitics*, p. 122.

44. *Ibidem*, p. 123.

45. Paolo Giordano, *Tasmania*, trans. Liviu Ornea, Bucharest, Ed. Trei, 2024, p. 297 (trad. aut.).

46. *Ibidem* (trad. aut.).

47. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2019, p. 67.

48. *Ibidem.*

49. *Ibidem*, p. 71-72.

50. *Ibidem*, p. 74.

51. *Ibidem*, p. 73.

52. *Ibidem*, p. 79.

53. *Ibidem*, p.53.

54. A. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 187.

55. O. Coates, *Achille Mbembe*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2025, p. 38-39.

56. *Ibidem*, p. 137.