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INFRAPOLITICAL NECESSITY, INCONSPICUOUS AND HONORABLE: WE BEGIN AGAIN

Time and again Antigone, a crucial figure in the Western tradition whose infrapolitical dimension is a condition of her tragicness, has been denied and concealed. It will become necessary to attend to infrapolitical Antigone more directly.

Alberto Moreiras
Infrapolítica (instrucciones de uso), 242, n.47.

The human being: the uncanniest of the uncanny.

Martin Heidegger
Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister', 51.

Infrapolitics is not a philosophy of life oriented toward the sublimation of death and extended in the name of more or better forms of representation, progress, development, culture, identity, politics, biopolitics etc. Rather, infrapolitics thinks from within a distance taken from every Hegelian operation extended in accordance with the affirmation of specific forms of life, subjectivity and politics, over and against all others. For this reason, in Alberto Moreiras' *Infrapolítica (instrucciones de uso)* (La Oficina 2020) infrapolitics uncovers an approach to the question of the ontological difference between beings and being, understanding that difference as the always double and simultaneous character of the question for the nothingness to which we all arrive, as well as for what remains bequeathed to us as a result of the closure of metaphysics.

Moreiras's thinking is an opening to the demand for a new beginning in and for thinking. This is necessary to a large extent because our epoch (that is, the epoch of total capitalism and of the systemic nihilism that we are obliged



to experience and suffer) installs and reproduces death not as mortality – or as a mourning for the conceptual itself – but as the production of a systemic death penalty that is also a fully economized and globalized apotheosis of the metaphysics of capitalist discourse.

Moreiras seeks to distance the act of thinking from modern political orthodoxies and inherited forms of representation, including those of all institutionalized (and therefore, university) forms of political and identitary instrumentalization. Infrapolitics does this in such a way as to pose once again the question of existence itself. This involves approaching the question of being and non-being – of nothingness, of the abyss – as an integral part of the exploration of everything in the human condition that might be unsusceptible to capture, or to the submission of the experiential singularity of each and every one of us to domination and biopolitical common sense.

Always taking distance from the Hegelian philosophy of history – that is, from enlightenment claims to consciousness and to the emancipation of the subject extended in the dialectical topology of Master and Slave – infrapolitics accepts that lived experience is always, and can only ever be, a question regarding *otherness*. It is a question for the promise of an otherness that invites us to think in relation to the unknown, the unhomely, the spectral, and the uncanny. Moreiras does not avoid the responsibility of orienting thinking toward finitude or the abyss. Neither does he conceal human uprootedness through the narcissistic compulsions of “essayism”, that is, through the characterization of the intellectual task as a personalist prevailing of the self over others (or even over oneself), in the name of the affirmation of political life or of specific forms of experience, of the politics of subjectivity, or of the demand for political hegemony. Infrapolitics in this book is more radical – less imaginary, more real – than any of that.

Infrapolítica (instrucciones de uso) recalls and reanimates Martin Heidegger’s words in the wake of the Second World War, when he offered a response to Jean Beaufret’s question “*Comment redonner un sens au mot ‘Humanisme’?*” Heidegger warned his French interlocutor that in light of the saturation of the human via the technicity of reason, perhaps it would be better to no longer strive to restore meaning to humanism but to learn to renounce, to the fullest extent possible, all the pretenses of the history of humanist metaphysics: “This question proceeds from your intention to retain the word “humanism”. I wonder whether that is necessary. Or is the damage caused by all such terms still not sufficiently obvious?” (1998: 241). For Heidegger (and some would say “conveniently”, given his own complicities), the history of humanism uncovered the industrialized atrocity of the second world war as both cause and effect of the multiple impositions of the nationalist and imperialist instrumentalization of humanity itself. The war exposed the conditions of the inhumane that traverse every humanism in full compliance with the monstrosity of beings themselves. In the contemporary state of affairs – which is no longer that of a world at war but of a world *of* unlimited warfare – infrapolitics highlights that it is necessary to revisit Heidegger’s conviction that “thinking does not

overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest. The descent, particularly where human beings have strayed into subjectivity, is more arduous and more dangerous than the ascent. The descent leads to the poverty of the ek-sistence of *homo humanus*. In ek-sistence the region of *homo animalis*, of metaphysics, is abandoned. The dominance of that region is the mediate and deeply rooted basis for the blindness and arbitrariness of what is called “biologism,” but also of what is known under the heading “pragmatism”. To think the truth of being at the same time means to think the humanity of *homo humanus*. What counts is *humanitas* in the service of the truth of being, but without humanism in the metaphysical sense” (268). The word ‘infrapolitics’ is the contemporary name for that arduous and dangerous descent into the nearness of the near, as well as to the approach to the tragicness that underlies and conditions it.

And herein lies the figure of Antigone. For infrapolitics, tragedy marks the experiential zone in which death “crosses over into the sphere of life, a life that moves into the realm of death” (Lacan 1992: 248). Herein the singularity of experience is the gift of death alone. For this reason, infrapolitics unravels the aporias that flow beneath the signifying chains – the legacies – of modern and contemporary domination. It does this in light of the political conformism of both Right and Left, as well as in light of the promise extended through their deconstruction. For this reason, infrapolitics understands tragedy as the root of experience, but it understands it as a root that is occluded – rendered oblivious – in the order of the total subsumption of humanity to total commodity fetishism and to the fully decontained death sentence that capitalism installs.

The figure of Antigone appears infrequently, but significantly, in *Infrapolítica (instrucciones de uso)*. Having said that, perhaps it could also be said that this is a figure that traverses the entirety of Moreiras’s intellectual trajectory from *Tercer espacio* (1999) and *Línea de sombra* (2006) to the present. In his most recent work, the question uncovered by Antigone appears at key moments that point not only in the direction of what is at stake in infrapolitics itself, but also in the direction of the relation upheld by Moreiras with his main references, Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. At the end of the book’s “Exergue” addressing Derrida’s *Glas* (11–18), Antigone appears for the first time in a quote from Derrida who, writing in first person – an extraordinary and infrequent thing, Moreiras underlines –, signals the possibility of a thinking capable of interrupting metaphysics. The phantasmatic figure of Antigone opens the way for a second avatar for deconstruction. In *Glas*’s column on Hegel – against Hegel, Moreiras observes – Antigone “de-metaphorizes the system, carrying absolute knowledge to its point of ruination [...], she takes a step back from every commentary, her silence encrypts her language, or her language encrypts silence. Hesychastic rhythm, we begin again” (2020: 18, translation mine).

Antigone – this phantasmatic figure – re-emerges in *Infrapolítica*’s third chapter in specific reference to the question of the distance between *polis* and politics in Martin Heidegger and Felipe Martínez Marzoa. Antigone emerges

here as the spectral trace of an extra-political approximation to Being, as a figure of that “something” (“extra-political necessity”, Moreiras calls it) without which life would be unlivable (68, translation mine). Through the specter of Antigone, the infrapolitical demand to “dwell in the unhomely”, as Heidegger put it in his reading of Sophocles, begins again.

Why is this important? Because, as Moreiras observes, “politics today, on the margins of the abandoned dignity of its concept, is sinister. Politics is what Creon does [...], lost in the abyss of the administrative demand” (75). On the contrary, infrapolitics marks an attempt to “develop a relation to existence that dwells in and posits the other of orderability, which, as a trace, is a residue of the free human being of the primary inception – the trace of Antigone and for that reason the hyperbolic condition of all future democracy” (77, translation mine).

It is on account of all of the above that we can say that infrapolitics does not provide us with the ground for a strictly political task, even though it always touches upon and transforms the conditions of the political themselves. It does not jump to respond to the question, “Where is infrapolitics’s politics?”, or “What can be done politically with infrapolitics?”. On the contrary, infrapolitics dwells and thinks from within the absolute distance between thinking and being, between existence and political existence, between life and politics. Within that difference, within that absolute difference, an “*other* beginning is at stake”, says Moreiras (118, translation mine). This is what the author refers to in chapter five as “an existential modification of existence itself” (132, translation mine). With this in mind, it can be said that infrapolitics *is* emancipatory desire, but it is so against the determinations, omissions and silences of the modern inheritance of emancipation. Echoing Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, infrapolitics uncovers “the indestructible ‘it is necessary’”.

Thanks to Alberto Moreiras’ *Infrapolítica (instrucciones de uso)* – a book that takes a radical distance from modern epochality itself (and therein lies its fundamental importance for all contemporary debates) – we can see that it is necessary to return to the question of the indestructibility of the ‘it is necessary’ in order to begin again not from within the metaphysics of humanism, but from what Heidegger called “the human being: the uncanniest of the uncanny”.

References

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