

Anthropocene, Infrapolitics, and Epochal  
Anxiety: Upon Reading Samanta Schweblin's  
*Kentukis* and *Distancia de rescate*

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As long as we do not thoughtfully experience what is,  
we can never belong to what will be.  
(M. Heidegger, 'Insight into That Which Is',  
*Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*)

Anxiety . . . is the central affect,  
the one around which everything else is organized.  
(J. Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*)

Thanks in part to Georges Didi-Huberman, it is widely acknowledged that on January 31st, 1941, Pier Paolo Pasolini addressed a letter to his friend and former lover, Franco Farolfi, in which he evoked a dark night on the slopes of the Pieve del Pino interrupted only by the transient and tenuous lights of the fireflies. In his epistle to Farolfi, Pasolini observed the diminutive luminosity of the fireflies and recalled the friendships of former times. By doing so, he indicated the relation between the present and the past as the basis for a fragile metaphor capable of orienting individual and collective experience toward a life beyond the domination of a world of war. Despite the grip of fascism, for Pasolini the persistence of a tenuous and ungraspable beauty perdured, as the exquisiteness of his sensuous vision evoked the conjuration of the past in the service of a differential future:

Friendship is a very nice thing. The night I am telling you about we ate at Paderno and then in the complete darkness we climbed up towards Pieve del Pino—we saw an immense number of fireflies which made clumps of fire among the clumps of bushes and we envied them because they loved each other, because they were seeking each other with amorous flights and lights while we were arid and all males in artificial peregrinations. Then I thought how beautiful friendship is and the bands of twenty-year-old youths who laugh with their innocent male voices and take no notice of the world around them, continuing along their lives, filling the night with their shouts. Theirs is a potential masculinity. Everything in them turns to laughter, to bursts of laughter (Pasolini in Didi-Huberman, 2018: 5-6).

In his recuperation of Pasolini's vision of youthful masculine sexuality, innocence, happiness, and laughter, Georges Didi-Huberman considers that the metaphor of the fireflies is intimately entwined with the suggestion of hope for a renewed political imagination:

In effect, it means nothing more nor less than rethinking our own "principle of hope," through the manner in which the Past meets the Present to form a glimmer, a flash, a constellation in which some form for our very Future suddenly breaks free. Although they skim just above the ground, moving so slowly, emitting such a weak light, don't the fireflies draw, strictly speaking, just such a constellation? To assert this about the minor example of fireflies is to assert also that in *our way of imagining* lies a fundamental condition of *our way of doing politics*.

Imagination is political; this is what we need to understand (2018: 29-30).

Thus is Didi-Huberman's humanist invitation to think the relation between the history and (dis)continuities of fascism, in conjunction with hope for the future mediated by the libidinal recuperation of a differential, diminutive, heliotropic metaphor. In other words, in the relation between the eye, perception, affect, metaphor, and the essentially humanist conjuration between the past and the present we glimpse in Didi-Huberman the promise of a principial re-imagining, and presumably of a future salvation. Let us not forget, however, that at the heart of Pasolini's epistle and of Didi-Huberman's recuperation of it lies the persistence of the master discourse of fascism, as a central and centralizing metaphorical basis for both modern subject production, as well as for the hope that underlies its potential displacement. It is the clarity of the master discourse—the end result of which 'is that things march in step for everyone', as Jacques Lacan put it in 'La Troisième' (1974: 19)—and therefore the relative clarity of our status in the face of the Other, that determine the melancholic conditions of hope for a transformative perception, imagination, friendship, political praxis, and social bond for the future.

It is also well known that in a letter penned in 1975, Pasolini lamented the fact that there were no more fireflies existing on the slopes of Pieve del Pino:

At the beginning of the sixties, the fireflies began to disappear in our nation, due to pollution of the air, and the azure rivers and limpid canals, above all in the countryside. This was a stunning and searing phenomenon. There were no fireflies left after a few years. Today this is a somewhat poignant recollection of the past (in Didi-Huberman, 2018: 10).

In this second epistle from over thirty years later the disappearance of the fireflies takes on the guise of a metaphor for the perishing of hope in, and for, the contemporary world. Between Pasolini's epistles of 1941 and 1975 we appear to pass from the modern age of promise for a transformative imagination of emancipation—for Didi Huberman, an imagination mediated predominantly by the melancholic perception of a fragile conjuration of a different future—to a postmodern age of extinction no longer mediated by the master discourse of fascism, but by species disappearance dominated by an Other which takes the form of a lack of significance (Soler, 2016).

In the relation between the two epistles, we face an increasing inability to perceive and measure the difference between hope for the future, the most banal and painless of experiences (anthropogenic species disappearance), and the everyday silent injunctions of planetary tragedy. In the relation between 1941 and 1975, I would suggest, we can intuit that the 'epochal underside of history' (Schürmann, 1990: 37)—that of the modern instantiation of humanism, for example—has shifted, and continues to shift, in its relation to the modern history of, and enduring faith in, the subjectivist centrality of human perception, understanding, labor, and emancipation. Pasolini's 1975 letter brings up the question of our status in the face of the Other in ways that his 1941 epistle does not. As already suggested, in Did-Huberman's recuperation of the 1941 text the social bond of the future is determined by a humanist hope for a differential perception and signification that emerges in contradistinction to the penumbra of the master discourse of fascism. In 1975 capitalist discourse testifies that a hope for a differential bond or determination is merely unavailable. In the shadow world of melancholic affect of 1941, the corporeal part-object—Pasolini's perceptive eye—stands out and promises an imaginative, romantic, vision. In 1975 there is nothing to see, other than the suspension of the continuist presuppositions of the metaphorical relation between past and future which underlie both the 1941 epistle and its subsequent recuperation

by Didi-Huberman. Thanks to the centrality of Pasolini's eye the fireflies of 1941 are inscribed for Didi-Huberman as a consolation for the lack of pleasure and beauty that characterizes the modern experience of industrialized warfare. They become a metaphor for the possible reconversion of melancholy into hope, the sign of a light that does not succumb to domination and therefore occupies the place of an imaginable symbol of happier times, both past and potentially future. The hope is to be able to live through, thanks to, and via, this (fragile) metaphor in such a way as to leave behind the monumental metaphors of aggression that dominate the world. In Didi-Huberman the conditions for a utopic politics of the firefly, that is, the promise of a romantic social bond originating from this tenuous metaphor of love and hope are deemed to be imaginable, and the author of *Survival of the Fireflies* even suggests that there might be such a thing available to us now if we perceive its coming appropriately. But considering the empirical and metaphorical *nihil* that is inscribed at the heart of the 1975 epistle, and therefore the decomposition therein of the writing subject's relation to the Other, and therefore the anthropogenic decomposition of the imaginary in general, there is no recuperation of an Enlightenment inheritance, or master discourse, capable of orienting life toward happiness. From the perspective of 1975, the eye that sees the minor light in 1941 uncovers human centered ego-perspectivism as a mere youthful romanticism, of little to no value for the anthropogenic present. What, we might ask, would be the consequences for our understanding of the political via a critical evaluation of the finitude of the fragile metaphor of the fireflies and of the humanist melancholy that surrounds its recuperation by Didi-Huberman?

Approaching this question might uncover pathways *other than* those trodden by the utopic political ontologies of human centered ego-perspectivism, and of the Enlightenment cogito that anchors it. This *other* path is the one I would like to tread in the following pages; it is a path that remains critical of the heliotropic metaphor and of the centrality of the part-object—

the eye—that guides access to both monumental (fascist) and minor light in the name of the happiness of humanity, of the hope of a resistant politics, and therefore of a humanist ontology deemed to be inherently just in nature. In what follows, then, I will extend a respectful *polemos* with the metaphorical sense of the perception of the firefly as it is given and encountered in Didi-Huberman's approach to Pasolini. At the center of the *polemos* is the limit that is internal to the mastery of the eye that sees, or that imagines that it sees, and to the hope that it assigns—perhaps even onto-theologically—to a world of perception later exposed to the silent disappearances of the Anthropocene. The firefly remains, in Didi-Huberman, a continuist metaphor for the centrality of the human eye as the part object that perceives its light, and of an ego that reconverts its object into a symbol of hope for a politics of emancipation. It signals the promise of a future world devoid of human destitution or dispossession in which the presumption is that the imagination, praxis, and social-political organization are reconciled. The firefly for Didi-Huberman is the metaphorization of an imaginary relation with a potential future happiness, presumably beyond and devoid of all discontent. There is indeed darkness all around in 1941, but the light of the fireflies still evokes the general law of metaphoric value to the extent that it intervenes 'in the process of axiological and semantic value' (Derrida, 1982: 218). By this I mean to indicate that the devil is not in the fireflies of 1941, but in the eye-light-metaphor-value relation that is the tropic movement of both the metaphor and the continuist presuppositions of its recuperation. One is left wondering, in other words, whether there is an anthropogenic metaphor that remains an outside to all innocent metaphors of modern romanticism, and if so, how, and where, it dwells and remains, and to what effect?

Is there, in other words, a metaphor adequate to the anthropogenic disappearance of the fireflies in 1975, a metaphor that would allow us to grasp the destitution of our current condition? Pasolini's letter of 1975 seems to suggest

that there has been a shift in the overall *Gestell* (Heidegger, 2012: 31) and social *dispositif*, by which metaphor and the political imagination come to presence and are given to each other, and to us, for thought.<sup>i</sup> It is in the face of the ‘enigma of the Other which takes the form of a lack of significance’ (Soler, 2016: loc. 542) that I would like to posit the following questions regarding the Anthropocene and how to think it: For example, how is it with anxiety? How is it with the relation between anxiety and epochality, or, rather, with the relation between anxiety and the fact that ‘the epochal underside of history is shifting’ (Schürmann, 1990: 37)?<sup>ii</sup>

In order to approach this question, I would first like to revisit one of the principal paradigms of contemporary academic political thinking on the Left: the overcoming of Left-wing melancholia. I will then move in the direction of infrapolitical epochal anxiety as a placeholder for the affective charge, or existential condition, of an anthropogenic epoch without epochality. I do this via a reading of two recent novels penned by the Argentine author, Samanta Schweblin (*Kentukis* [2018] and *Distancia de rescate* [2014]). Throughout, I am drawn to the question of metaphor and anxiety, in their relation to the conditions of contemporary techno-scientific domination and climate-related destitution. In what follows, then, I will first question the paradigm that seeks to overcome Left-wing melancholia—a paradigm of desire that also lies at the heart of Didi-Huberman’s recuperation and reworking of Pasolini’s 1941 epistle—and then address two approaches to *angustia*. The first of these two approaches to anxiety is situated specifically in the overall vicinity of the Marxist inheritance (via Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*). It is therefore situated in the overall vicinity of the modern understanding of emancipation. The second is located in the vicinity of the Oedipal melodrama that lies at the heart of *l’angoisse* (Lacan), and this in the context of the contemporary technoscientific *Gestell* that uncovers climate collapse as *the* area of concern for thinking and acting in the thirty years since Derrida published *Specters of Marx*. Both cases are significant for an understanding of an infrapolitical

imagination because from their distinctive positions they provide the gift of a question regarding *topos* and abyss in, and of, the contemporary. They both tremble, in different ways, at the existential limit between the 'there is' and 'there is not' (Derrida, 1987: 28), and both are situated 'beyond or behind metaphysics, beyond or behind Hegel' (30). As such, they both tremble beyond or behind modern *consciousness* and *production*, and exhibit the uncanny contours of an *other*, obscure, non-humanist, an-archic, scene of being-with.

If fascism denotes the reactionary visibilization of the discourse of the modern master—of a modality of life and of death-giving by which the metaphysical comes to presence in the politics of the *princeps* and his hoardes—and if Pasolini's and Didi-Huberman's fireflies mark the promise of a differential heliotropic metaphor for the future, how does one pass from Left-wing melancholic longing for an emancipation long gone to a thinking that is synchronous with the predicament inaugurated by the techno-scientific *Gestell* of contemporary capitalist discourse?

### *Left-Wing Melancholy*

The publication in 2016 of Enzo Traverso's *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* is a significant point of departure for evaluating the way in which the past re-encounters the present in the name of hope for a differential heliotropic order of metaphoricity. This book revisits the question of the Left's increasingly restricted horizon of expectations and explains that horizon once again as a symptom of a melancholic libido, or impotence. Traverso's *Left-Wing Melancholia* is the latest chapter in a debate grounded in *objeklos* and in the calling forth of the dead, that is, in the conjuring up of the past for the present in the name of an emancipatory tradition. However, its purpose is not to grapple with phantasms but to survey and repair the Left's historical attachments while also striving to move beyond the impasses



that have been its lot for decades. In this sense, there appears to be little distance between the plight of dialectical materialism and the overall area of melancholic affect that underlies Didi-Huberman's interest in the diminutive heliotropic metaphor of the fireflies. In the case of *Left-Wing Melancholia*, it is a debate whose funereal strategy is already posited in the direction of life, against death, and in which there can be no room for phantasms. Within this strategy there lies, it is declared, the possibility of a Phoenix-like reawakening of a utopian political consciousness for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, spurred on by the hope that modern dialectical materialism will once again be in possession of, or will be able finally to assign a specific place in the symbolic order for, all its lost objects, failed projects, hopes, and desires. But the discussion regarding Left-wing melancholia is predetermined fully by the Enlightenment metaphysics of humanism. As such, it falls short of fully determining what the actual matter for thinking is at this time, which, I will propose, is the end of a certain understanding of epochality in the context of a Left-wing misapprehension of epochality, existence, and care for being. For this reason, in this debate one can see clearly why contemporary 'elaborations about dialectic are akin to the process of explaining a surging spring on the basis of the stagnant water of a sewer', as Heidegger observed in reference to Hegel's understanding of experience (2002: 137).

What is curious is that the reasons for the ongoing insolvency of the modern humanist political imagination of the Left are already registered at the heart of Wendy Brown's article, 'Resisting Left-Melancholia', which initiated the debate back in 1999. In this work Brown returned to Stuart Hall and Walter Benjamin to posit the question of epochality, observing that Left-wing melancholia announces the longstanding problem of epochal misunderstanding and misapprehension. Stuart Hall, Brown notes, charged that the ascendancy of the neoliberal right 'was consequent to the Left's own failure to apprehend the character of the age, and to develop a political critique and a moral-political vision appropriate to this character' (Brown,

1999: 19). In other words, Left-wing melancholia is, in Brown's understanding, a symptom of a certain form of Left-wing fetishism. In contrast, Brown's critical diagnosis in the late 1990s is both grim and far-reaching. She announces the exhaustion and imminent finitude of an entire episteme, politics, historical subject, hermeneutic, praxis, universalizable technique, economics, and experience. Her warning in the face of any possible nostalgia under such conditions is persuasive: 'If the contemporary Left often clings to the formations and formulations of another epoch . . . it literally renders itself a conservative force in history-one that not only misreads the present but instils traditionalism in the very heart of its praxis . . .' (25). This then leads to the formulation of the following question and response:

What is entailed in throwing off the melancholic and conservative habits of the Left to invigorate it with a radical (from the Latin *radix*, meaning 'root'), critical and visionary spirit again? This would be a spirit that embraces the notion of a deep and unsettling transformation of society rather than recoiling at this prospect, even as we must be wise to the fact that neither total revolution nor the automatic progress of history would carry us towards whatever reformulated vision we might develop (Brown, 1999: 26).

Brown's concern for the historical Left's epochal misapprehension has scarcely left a mark in subsequent iterations of the debate regarding Left-wing melancholia (e.g., Jodi Dean, 2013). This might explain why Enzo Traverso's understanding of Left-wing melancholia is still, and only ever, a humanist wager for the therapeutic re-centering of the epochal figure of Man. Traverso proposes putting melancholy, together with its relation to mourning, on the side of the Hegelian dialectic as if it could be willed into inexistence. But by the end of the book, we are no closer to having the tools to rethink such a project in a nonrevolutionary age. The reason for this is that

Traverso's desire is to conjure up subjective presence from nothing in order to once again determine communist/socialist Being as planetary *presence*. In this sense, remedying Left-wing melancholia is proposed via a kind of productionist *fort-da* (but without the phantasms) which presupposes the exhumation of all the prior monuments to the will to power from the 19th and 20th centuries. This raises the question, however, of whether the 21st century desire for communist subjectification actually overturns, rejects, or reins in the Platonic-Christian episteme that originates it, or whether it is a mere imitation of prior forms and pathways in the name of the presence, once again, of an already exhausted metaphysics of subjective/collective consciousness, presence, and praxis. It is noteworthy, after all, that there lies at the heart of this debate a basic misunderstanding of melancholy, to the extent that its proponents fail to grapple with the negativity that Brown first highlighted in the late 1990s. The discussion recognizes the denial of the world as an object of love, but merely strives to transcend it via more humanism, rather than to inhabit or traverse it. As such, despite neo-communist claims to the contrary, Left-wing melancholia cannot emerge from its own mute crypt, nor enter a new and fundamental dimension. For Traverso the disappearance of the Soviet world, experienced as Freudian *objektlos* or as a nostalgia for origins, marks the moment at which the coming forth of Left-wing melancholy made itself felt. This creates the conditions for establishing the relation between two presences ('then' and 'now', and therefore for a vague notion of progress via the implementation of Traverso's historicist technique). Communist desire (as Dean expresses it) is that of a desire for an exhumed/resumed object that re-connects, via the dialectic (via the appearance of a possible rehabilitation of linear time), the 'then' (Hegelianism, the philosophy of consciousness) with the 'now' (the morning after Hegelianism; the morning after the philosophy of consciousness). It is therefore a quest for a trope (a metaphor) of resemblance between past and present, thereby denoting a continuist presupposition in which the past can once again designate the future. This continuist

presupposition is the ground for the fetishistic (humanist) understanding of historicity that underlines and perpetuates the melancholy of the critique of Left-wing melancholy, as it seeks to revamp, in the absence of any meditation on ground itself, the principal subjectivism (the cogito) of modern epochal history and historicism. The debate therefore seeks to compel a neutralization of the symptoms of modern time and history (to exorcize the melancholy that haunts the demise of the time of progress) in the name of a resumption of modern time and history conducive to a new will to power (to a new self-possession of a specifically communist subject, and political imagination). But it does so the morning after all modern claims to the new have already run their course. It is for this reason that Traverso's principal origin, and economy of past/present presencing, and therefore of praxis, remain purely modern, and purely anthropocentric. As a result, in 'Left-Wing Melancholia' there is no shaking of metaphysics. Rather, the proposition demonstrates, as Jacques Derrida observed in 1968, that 'in many ways . . . we are today on the eve of Platonism. Which can also, naturally, be thought of as the morning after Hegelianism' (Derrida, 2021: 107-108). It is of course this 'morning after Hegelianism'—this generalized experience of posterity—that determines the conditions of a debate that is unwilling to contemplate the destruction of the history of metaphysics that gave birth to it. Therefore, it cannot turn the page on its own symptoms.

#### *Anxiety and the Question of Emancipation*

In contrast, in *Specters of Marx* Derrida had certainly understood the weight of the situation and its implications for a Marxian inheritance undergoing the erosion of an entire history of metaphorization and praxis. In a largely uncommented passage in which he addresses the question of conjuration and borrowing in Marx's *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*—and therefore of the way in which the past encounters the present—Derrida lingers momentarily on the underlying

anxiousness (*ängstlich*) of the decision, in its relation to the leap into *praxis*. In this section, Derrida turns what he calls the 'properly revolutionary' away from the humanist domain of will (to power) and consciousness, away therefore from the dialectical order of militant representation and historicism upheld for centuries by the Enlightenment legacies of Cartesianism and Hegelianism:

It is indeed a matter of convoking or conjuring (*beschwören*) the spirits as specters in a gesture of positive conjuration, the one that swears in order to call up and not to drive away. But can one uphold this distinction? For if such a conjuration seems welcoming and hospitable, since it calls forth the dead, makes or lets them come, it is never free of anxiety. And thus of a movement of repulsion or restriction. Not only is the conjuration characterized by a certain anxiety, it does not let itself be determined merely *in addition* by this anxiety (as the word *ängstlich* suggests), it is destined to the anxiety *that it is*. The conjuration is anxiety from the moment it calls upon death to invent the quick and to enliven the new, to summon the presence of what is not yet there (*noch nicht Dagewesenes*). This anxiety in the face of the ghost is properly revolutionary. If death weighs on the living brain of the living, and still more on the brains of revolutionaries, it must then have a spectral density (Derrida, 1994: 135).

Derrida returns to Marx's *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire* and yet posits the question of political praxis in the context of a dilapidated dialectical ground emptied of universals. He does so by making space for anxiety (*ängstlich*, meaning 'anxious', 'apprehensive', 'uneasy', 'timorous', etc.) as the affective awareness of (onto-theo-archeo-teleological) groundlessness; that is, as the end of an entire understanding of history. Anxiety expresses

awareness of an underlying affective excess to all things subsumed under the dialectical calculations of modern realpolitik and so-called universalizing translation. He turned the ‘properly revolutionary’, and therefore the overall realm of the decision, toward a murky experience of passive disquiet that the teleology of progress and the modern politics of emancipation only ever seeks to subsume in the name of political consciousness.

The ‘positive conjuration’ of the specter of Marx comes into being only ever in relation to the experience of anxiety in the face of the ghost. Herein anxiety—rather than melancholy, or hope—is the affective placeholder of a practice that underlies all dialectical historicity. Derrida’s take on the ‘properly revolutionary’ is clearly not a question of dialecticizing the dead back to life, which is never possible, of transcending the history of the modern ontology of the subject (bourgeois and proletarian) in the name of the will to power, or of absolute spirit. Rather, it is a question of dwelling in such a way as to experience, to live within, the shaking of those premises to their very core in order to see what lies beneath, and prior, to every act. For Marx and Derrida, ‘anxiety’ (understood as *ängstlich* and *l’angoisse*) is the name for both the obstacle to, and for the experience of, the question of praxis and epochality not through or thanks to Hegel, but from Hegel’s *other scene*: that is, through the affective underside of *the decision*. Herein it is anxiety rather than melancholy that speaks directly to our ability and/or inability to grapple with the fact of meaning-giving in the wake of the history of a certain sociological Hegelianism (which in Traverso is evidenced, for example, through the collapse of the Soviet world).

Enzo Traverso—indeed, the entire neo-communist template for thinking and acting—remains entrenched in a pathology of eternal recovery of prior subjective and historical forms, the limitations of which will be presumably, or at least this is the hope, remedied or refortified somewhere along the way. But the debate regarding Left-wing melancholia—and clearly both

Pasolini and Didi-Huberman are not far away from this overall question regarding melancholia—enacts a certain unwillingness and inability to think negativity (for example, self-estrangement, alienation) decisively enough. It is this constitutive limitation that anchors historical materialism's ongoing misapprehension of epochality, together with its hope for the future.

But there is more to address here, for thirty years after *Specters of Marx* we also need to recognize that Derrida's open-handed appraisal that 'anxiety in the face of the ghost is properly revolutionary' might not be the only placeholder for the concept and experience of our current understanding of anxiety in relation to the contemporary *Gestell*. For there is now an added dimension to the problematic in question, which confronts contemporary thought with its powerlessness to 'invent the quick and to enliven the new', as Derrida put it. This added dimension brings us back to Pasolini's anthropogenic epistle of 1975. In his recent work on 'the climate of history', for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty laments that: 'All my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture in which humanity finds itself today' (25). It appears that for Chakrabarty the current planetary conjuncture—the contemporary *Gestell*, or the absolute technical-scientific instrumentalization of the planet itself—would render Derrida's approach to the anxiety-decision-praxis relation almost quaint. The existential threat that is climate collapse—its absolute nearness to everything we know and experience and will most likely experience forevermore—might leave little room for what Derrida, accompanied by Marx, referred to as the 'properly revolutionary'. After all, and as Chakrabarty points out, the warnings of an imminent danger, and indeed of our actual handle on a reality that seems to be characterized by the snowballing effect of dispossession from the social bond itself, seem to be shifting in such a way as to

distance us from the history of modern thought and from the modern thinking of emancipation that has been one of our central pillars since Thomas Newcomen's invention in 1712 of the 'atmospheric steam engine' (Lovelock, 2019: loc. 471) and the subsequent inauguration of the Industrial Revolution.

In the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union Derrida had observed that 'if death weighs on the living brain of the living, and still more on the brains of revolutionaries, it must then have a spectral density' (1994: 135). He says this from within an overall concern for the question of emancipation spanning the decades from the middle of the twentieth century to the early 1990s. My point, however, is that the passage of the last thirty years has altered entirely the spectral density of our relation to and understanding of epochality, and therefore of dwelling, perception, production, and decision-making, and that we have not been, and are not yet, and most likely never will be, fully up to the task. It is also clear that neither the political sphere nor the university are capable of facing up to the 'properly revolutionary', particularly when it entails the destruction of the metaphysical mastery of humanism and its entire understanding of modern history.

For this reason, the order of perception-consciousness that is internal to anxiety requires urgent infrapolitical, post-metaphysical, attention now. The anxiety signaled by Derrida in the early 1990s and the anxiety registered by Chakrabarty in the face of climate collapse are not identical, yet they are the same 'in the sense of belonging together in the essential prevailing of the being of beings' (Heidegger, 1998: 97). What is worthy of thought now is the determination of the non-identical sameness that underlies the relation of anxiety, between what Derrida called the 'properly revolutionary' and the imminence of an age of extinction that is already upon us; an epochal shift in the spectral density of semantic depth itself, beyond all measure. In other words, a reckoning with the shift in the overall *Gestell* of the contemporary that uncovers the



way in which the epochal underside of history has shifted between Pier Paolo Pasolini's thinking in 1941 and the species disappearance he registered in 1975.

### *The Age of Anxiety*

It is with a certain sense of urgency, and unfortunately with very little time to do so adequately, that I will now move in the direction of Jacques Lacan's guiding metaphor of anxiety. As highlighted in *Seminar X*, 'anxiety is not *objektlos*, it is not without object' (Lacan, 2014: 157). It is always faced with something. The problem, however, is how to see and comprehend what it faces? Lacan's seminar on *Anxiety* returns to the Oedipal melodrama in order to *re-see* 'the one who possessed the object of desire and of the law, the one who found *jouissance* with his mother, Oedipus' (2014: 162). From within the story's dialectic of recognition, Lacan pinpoints the moment of 'Perception-Consciousness' in which Oedipus realizes what he has done. Lacan asks: 'How can one express what belongs to the realm of the inexpressible and whose image I want nevertheless to make emerge?' (162). Herein lies the difficulty: to express the utterly horrendous and inexpressible in the form of an image, a metaphor, and in the register of meaning, understanding, and knowledge:

He sees what he has done, which brings with it the consequence that he sees—this is the word I'm coming up against—a moment after, his own eyes, their vitreous humour swollen, lying on the ground in a sorry heap of waste. Having torn them from their sockets, he has clearly lost his sight, and yet, he is not without seeing them, seeing them as such, finally unveiled as object-cause of the last, the ultimate, not guilty but uncurbed, concupiscence, that of having wanted to know. Tradition has it that it was from then on that he became truly a seer . . . What is the

moment of anxiety? . . . It is the impossible sight that threatens you, of your own eyes lying on the ground. This is the surest key to what you can always find in the phenomenon of anxiety (Lacan, 2014: 162).

Lacan suggests that we learn from the civilizational discontent of this destitute out-of-body experience of perception, in such a way as to approach the question of meaning when there is no longer a notion of *experience* available to us such as that of the *dialectical* movement that consciousness exercises on itself. Metaphor, as such, is exposed to the destitution of self-consciousness that underlies every humanist metaphor of dwelling, gathering, proximity, consciousness, perception, and light. For Oedipus love deceives, the imaginary deceives, the entire metaphoric structure and metaphysical derivation of the family deceives (until, that is, it is already too late). Anxiety, however, does not deceive. Anxiety is the affective trace of the demystification of our metaphysical fables and histories, and it always signals an inroad into the *object-a*, as a question of an *other*, obscure, an-archic scene for being-with. ‘He sees—this is the word I’m coming up against’, observes Lacan in passing, in reference to the experience of seeing the impossible sight of your own eyes as phantasmal placeholders and part-objects signaling the destitution of the *cogito ergo sum*, of Hegelian sublation and instrumentalization, and of every exercise of mastery: those eyes lying on the ground ‘in a sorry heap of waste’—that constitutive, inoperative, outside of metaphor *within* the order of metaphor—hold not a political but an infrapolitical key to the overall affective assemblage of the known, the knowable, and the uncanny destitution of the subject.

Lacan insists on the phantasmal existence of the eyes thrown on the ground as the simultaneous topos and abyss, the retreat of/from each and every metaphor, of light and insight, of the Good and the One. Here, in this infrapolitical scene, the

decision cannot pass effortlessly in the direction of the metaphorization of gathering and proximity, or hope, for the 'vitreous humour(s)' make manifest that the gap between the metaphysics of humanism and the groundlessness—the *not*—of perception cannot be dialecticized. On that an-archic ground there is no hopeful economization of the abyss available. It is for this reason alone that anxiety is worthy of thought now perhaps more than ever, perhaps also recognizing, as already mentioned, that we cannot be up to the task. For the thinking of humanist destitution by traversing the tragic rottenness of our inherited humanist metaphors just might be the properly inceptual task of the contemporary *Gestell*. Everything else might be just ornamentation, or another quest for surplus value, or for a new political ontology of the humanist subject grounded in the melancholic hope that the past can be conjured up and brought to presence in the present in such a way as to guarantee the happiness of the species in the future.

As Derrida indicated in *The Truth in Painting*, for Kant 'happiness and culture presuppose that man puts to work what nature puts at his disposal' (1987: 107). The early Marx reconverted the happiness and culture of labor and production into the subjugation of man's species-being under the torment of estranged labor (of 'commodity-man' 'lost to himself' in the order of private property). He therefore defined emancipation as the recuperation of a lost object ('the return of man to himself' is the expression extended by Marx) and the salvaging of man's species-being, nature, and spirit, via '*truly human, social property*' (1844: 82). Emancipation in this formulation is the resolution of human alienation via self-recuperation.<sup>iii</sup> In contrast to Marx's early formulations of fidelity to emancipation, anxiety does not tell itself stories of anthropocentric happiness, resolution, culture, spirit, production, or therapeutic recovery. It does not move in the direction of centralized ego perception and the recuperative affect of melancholy. Anxiety moves in the direction of the perishing—rather than in the direction of the continuist presuppositions—of the heliotropic metaphors of human

consciousness and of the onto-theological hope for an essential species-being for past, present, and future.

In this sense anxiety, rather than melancholy, offers an in-road. But it offers an in-road into the current conjuncture that is in attunement with the epochal underside of history shifting away from the metaphysical theticism of modern humanist neo-communism and the well-intentioned hopes of the academic Left. Anxiety, in other words, is not devoid of a post-epochal disposition, nor therefore of a post-epochal responsibility, or orbit of decision. But while climate collapse certainly provides us with a (scientifically) intelligible visibility, it does not provide us with an eye (a location, discernment, perceptiveness, or judgement). In our contemporary experience of innermost obscurity—in which the master discourse has been supplemented by the capitalist discourse of the global economy—the question of what our status is in the face of the Other anchors the experience of anxiety and the need for a decision consistent with the question of Being itself. This is the area of concern that remains to be brought forth in all its abyssal, an-archic, destitute, unfamiliarity. Such is the task of infrapolitics in this (post-nuclear, anthropocene) age of anxiety; an age in which it is not clear what we are seeing, and therefore feeling, and in which the unrepresentable chokes our ability to think in ways that are not subsumed entirely to the techno-scientific domain. It behoves us therefore to explore that area of concern in greater detail.

*Infrapolitical Imagination and the Age of Anxiety:*

*Samanta Schweblin's Kentukis (2018) and Distancia de rescate (2014)*

In 'The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought', a lecture delivered in Rome in 1967, Martin Heidegger asks: 'How do things stand with respect to the being enclosed of the human being in its technical-scientific world?' (126). Samanta Schweblin's novels *Kentukis* (2018) and *Distancia de rescate*

(2014) belong together in their prevailing concern for the being of beings in, and thanks to, the contemporary *Gestell* dominated by planetary technics and climate collapse. In both novels the order of perception-consciousness extends an invitation for the reader to meditate alongside Heidegger's question regarding how things stand in a global civilization in which technology determines fully the mode and possibilities available to humanity for thinking, acting, and being. Both novels bear witness in different ways to the fact that the epochal underside of history is shifting (Schürmann, 1990: 37), and that humanity is enduring a transformation in its historical modalities of technological enframing and being, beyond the imaginary certainties and identifications offered by the master discourse of modernity.

In these novels, the advent of the discourse of global capitalism, understood as a supplement to the master discourse, uncovers the Other as lack no longer symbolized exclusively in the imaginary, as the basis for an order of subjective political identifications, but via an ever-expanding metonymic circulation of objects *a*. The Other in these novels, in other words, is at once everywhere and nowhere, and as such cannot be captured or framed in a particular representation of meaning, law of understanding, process of subjectification, or world picture. It means that the conditions of being-with are rendered uncannily illegible, for in the standing reserve of the global economy, as represented in Schweblin's narratives, no one truly knows what their status as an object of the Other is, or should be, beyond intuiting that they are mere objects without access to knowledge regarding the desire of the Other. This condition is perhaps the determining feature of the contemporary *Gestell*, which preordains both current forms of de-humanization and the university's neurotic recourse to subjectivity and identity as the only means of affirming and understanding absolutely anything cultural, political, or institutional (other than the specifically techno-scientific).

In Schweblin's 2018 novel, *Kentukis*, there is no narrative carrying the storyline from beginning to end. Rather, it just begins anywhere, with a group of adolescents booting up their newly purchased device—a 'kentuki'—and ending arbitrarily somewhere else, with a closing question regarding freedom that the narrative could have generated at any time in its development: 'Alina . . . estaba tan rígida que sentía su cuerpo crujir, y por primera vez se preguntó, con un miedo que casi podría quebrarla, si estaba de pie sobre un mundo del que realmente se pudiera escapar' (220-1).

*Kentukis* offers the reader a banal collage of different storylines that are vaguely interconnected by what appears to be a common libidinal investment in a world of promised or potential communication that is provided to human beings by their relation to a new technological device—the kentuki—that slowly begins to saturate lives and life spaces, affects, media representations, and individual and collective existences, after having first entered the global market thanks to the world of economic de-regulation. For a price of \$279, the consumer purchases, charges, and turns on their kentuki, which, in the guise of an animal such as an owl or a rabbit, can follow the consumer wherever they go as long as the kentuki remains sufficiently charged. Upon charging and turning on the appliance the consumer immediately becomes the 'master'. Somewhere in the world, however, the kentuki is operated by another human being—who is also known as a kentuki, thereby collapsing the distinction between human and device, between having and being, seeing and being seen, or in fact between master and servant, master and master, or servant and servant. The kentuki shadows, oversees, accompanies, and communicates non-verbally with the master-purchaser across linguistic and spatial distances and boundaries. In this sense, the contraption is the object-cause of everything that is said and done—of every communication—in the world of the novel, and indeed in the novels' relation to its reader, as it establishes voyeuristic storylines that traverse the globe from South Bend to Oaxaca, Umbertide, Trinidad, Dubai, Lyon, Beijing, Buenos

Aires, Tel Aviv, Roraima etc. The kentuki is the author, in other words, of a fully de-contained, borderless, community of voyeurs.

But little of any note happens in the novel, and there is no dialectic between master and kentuki/servant available to the reader. There is as such no modern sense of history or storyline in *Kentukis*. One of the novel's characters, Alina, merely brings the novel to a close upon realizing that her partner has used her kentuki, which they have chosen to call Coronel Sanders, as the protagonist in an art installation that has incorporated her (her actions, words, and movements) as its principal object. Upon discovering that she has become mere content, a consumerist master rendered a mere servant without realizing it, and, moreover, that she is being recognized publicly for 'mistreating' her kentuki, Alina, who was intending to leave her partner and to abandon Oaxaca for good, wonders whether she will in fact ever be free. Hence the novel's closing question: 'Por primera vez se preguntó, con un miedo que casi podría quebrarla, si estaba de pie sobre un mundo del que realmente se pudiera escapar' (220-1). End of story.

The question is akin to asking whether at some point Alina will ever (implausibly) free herself of her own *jouissance*, for the kentuki is, in the end, a technological apparatus of post-human *jouissance* capture, objectification, extension, and globalization. The device is the active reduction of humanity, via the latter's voluntary servitude to technics, to being a signifier for another signifier, an object *a* for another object *a*. This active and completely normalized reduction is the hidden, infrapolitical, truth of *Kentukis*, in which the sole social role available to each individual is to represent and perform their pre-assigned role as a signifier/object *a*, having already chosen the kentuki upon its purchase as their master signifier. But the novel offers no knowledge of the world, beyond its awareness of the enigmatic existence of an Other that assumes the form of a generalized lack of significance and reflection both in the world of the novel as well as for the novel's reader. Herein the

distribution of the sensible appears to be meaningless, banal, both culturally and politically unsatisfactory, and while the characters know they live in a world devoid of *objektlos* none of them can gain knowledge regarding the reality of their relation to the Other, to their apparent object-cause of desire, or to the *jouissance* of the Other. In *Kentukis* everyone is always already equally proletarianized, since despite all appearances of communication, real or potential, and despite the overall desire for happiness, belonging, being, and subjective presence that underlies each and every purchase and storyline that accompanies it, there is actually in the novel ‘no discourse with which to make a social connection’ (Lacan, 1974: 27). This fact, that there is no common or communal consolation or compensation available for the experience of castration and impotence, determines the essential human destitution—the individual’s expulsion from the social bond in its relation to technics—that *Kentukis* presents and highlights as the *jouissance* of the global *Gestell* itself; a *jouissance* that is itself the contemporary civilizational disquiet internal to the capitalist discourse and to the lives of the humans that enjoy it, suffer it, prop it up, and extend it.

The question that closes the novel therefore recognizes that the Enlightenment notion of emancipation is an unrealizable dream in the contemporary *Gestell* (which might explain why the Leninist-Gramscian understanding of hegemony has been in a shambles for decades). However, in recognizing this, the closing question of *Kentukis* also raises the question of what might save now. Once again; “Se preguntó, con un miedo que casi podría quebrarla, si estaba de pie sobre un mundo del que realmente se pudiera escapar”. The anxiety and fear that underlie *Kentuki’s* closing question for an escape is, in the end, the novel’s underlying, infrapolitical, testimony to the way ‘things stand with respect to the being enclosed of the human being in its technical-scientific world’ (Heidegger, 2013 [1967]: 126). Seeing herself as mere content, as occupying a place outside the symbolic order and at the same time existing as an object in a world and global market replete with surveillance



and control, and therefore in an order which takes the form of a lack of subjective agential significance, the novel gives voice to Alina's anxiety-laden perception of her state of servitude to the banal horror of a life entirely calculable in advance, and of an existence devoid of human singularity. Anxiety, as Lacan defined it in Rome in 1974, is the 'feeling that arises as a result of this suspicion that comes to us, of being reduced to our body' (61). Alina comes to the realization that she is chained to nothing but bodily equivalence, of being like everybody else, equally instrumentalizable and equally interchangeable as mere content—as a signifier devoid of self-constitution and symbolic attachment in the absence of technology—thanks to the contemporary *Gestell's* techno-scientific enframing of planetary existence. This indicates that what lies at the heart of Schweblin's civilizational question at the end of *Kentukis* is more than a little reminiscent of Freud's insight from 1939, which only now—over eighty years later—can be framed as a description of the Anthropocene quandary in general; namely, that 'men are beginning to perceive that this newly-won power over space and time, this conquest of the forces of nature, this fulfillment of age-old longings, has not increased the amount of pleasure they can obtain in life, has not made them feel any happier. The valid conclusion from this is merely that power over nature is not the only condition of human happiness, just as it is not the only goal of civilization's efforts' (Freud, 2018: 34-5). This raises the question, though, of how to proceed in a direction other than that of the Anthropocene-driven fall into perennial civilizational disquiet that *Kentukis* registers?

Prior to *Kentukis* Samanta Schweblin had published *Distancia de rescate* (2014). This novel moves within the same overall area of concern as *Kentukis*, but it does so not in the direction of the quest for human happiness understood in conjunction with humanity's fall into the reduction of existence to calculation and equivalence. Rather, *Distancia de rescate* moves in the direction of facticity and singularity in the face of mortality. *Distancia de rescate*, in other words, begins and ends with the question of human and societal estrangement in the

face of mortality. This is not a novel, then, about the underlying problem of *being like* (*ser como*, or equivalence) in the contemporary *Gestell* (as is the case in *Kentukis*), but about learning how to be (*cómo ser*) in the contemporary *Gestell*. Whereas the pitfalls of the pleasure principle underline the thinking that goes into *Kentukis*, it is the death drive that prevails in *Distancia de rescate* and sheds light on how ‘things stand with respect to the being enclosed of the human being in [a] technical-scientific world’ (Heidegger, 2013 [1967]: 126).

In *Distancia de rescate* a mother and daughter, Amanda and Nina, have departed the city to vacation in a rural setting dominated nevertheless, it is slowly revealed, by the cultivation of an entire geography of soybean. In this sovereign domain in which soybean is king, any romantic return to nature is in fact an incursion into scientific technology and the invisible calculations of the global food economy. In this supposedly idyllic space, Amanda immediately encounters her neighbor Carla and her young son David, who appears to suffer from a mysterious cognitive ailment, and a certain commonality, familiarity, or intimacy is struck up between the two women. This is, however, the most banal and skeletal of plot summaries, for what is really at stake in the novel is the relation between knowledge (reason, calculation, perception, awareness, consciousness, seeing) and the uncanny sense of an imminent danger, of the passage from life to death in just a question of hours. In other words, the novel does not engage with the way the past emerges into the present in such a way as to reimagine a politics of hope for the future. On the contrary, there is no future in *Distancia de rescate*, and the present—which is characterized by Amanda lying on her death bed while responding to questions directed toward her by Carla’s son, David, who is accompanying her on the limit of life—is oriented toward understanding the passage from the past to the present, via a search for the very moment at which present experience came into being and converted mortality into consciousness of being as being-towards-death.

Early in the novel Amanda reveals that she lives and, as it turns out, dies by the instinctive maternal ethic of the 'rescue distance', an imaginary social bond between mother and child ('el hilo invisible que nos une', Amanda calls it [37]) that is guaranteed, she believes, by the mothers' ability to estimate the physical distance to her child at any given time, which is then also calculated in conjunction with the amount of time it would take to save the child from any imminent danger. It is an imaginary social bond and form of reasoning designed to protect both child and mother against any sense of dread or helplessness they might incur, while ensuring existential safety from any kind of imminent social danger. In this sense, the rescue distance is both a symptom of, and a protection against, anxiety in the face of real or potential injury or death.

But the significant thing is that the novel uncovers the powerlessness of the 'rescue distance' and the helplessness of its maternal calculations, for by the time the novel begins it is already too late, what has happened has happened, and it only remains to try to understand what remains in its wake. The rescue distance suggests an instinctive faith in human calculability, and therefore in the existence of a world that can always be subjected, modified, and improved for the benefit of human dominance and spatial-temporal control. But the fact is that both Amanda and David are in the hospital confronting the powerlessness of the rescue distance in the face of something far more gigantic—the contemporary *Gestell*—that remains invisible and beyond representation, yet permeates everything in the novel, from the town's poverty to the dead and dying animal life, contaminated land, and the dozens of seriously deformed children born there.

This is where David's questions and overall function in the novel become particularly significant. The young boy's questions and comments from beginning to end are those of an uncanny counsellor, ghost, guardian angel, clairvoyant, or analyst who strives to uncover something that still remains invisible both in the past and present, but that, he seems to believe, can be

brought into the visibility and the perceptibility of the world precisely by meditating on the limit between life and death, and, in particular, on the moment at which mortality begins to succumb to death. In other words, in David there is a singular vision and clarity, a viewing ahead toward that which is not yet evident and remains unknown, but in which the time of death far outweighs that of the ontological time of economic progress and underdevelopment by which the town is forced to exist. David, in other words, is intent on dis-covering that which remains concealed, the moment of perception in which human destitution touches upon the symbolic order. And it is this work toward persistent unconcealment that makes David central to understanding the origin of the novel's overall artistic design, alongside the goal of its overall thinking:

*Hay que ser paciente y esperar. Y mientras se espera hay que encontrar el punto exacto en el que nacen los gusanos . . . porque es importante, es muy importante para todos . . . El punto exacto está en un detalle, hay que ser observador . . . Está sucediendo, Amanda. Estoy arrodillado en el borde de tu cama, en uno de los cuartos de la salida de emergencias. Tenemos poco tiempo, y antes de que el tiempo se acabe hay que encontrar el punto exacto . . . Amanda, este es el momento, no te distraigas. Buscamos el punto exacto porque queremos saber cómo empieza (11-66).*

David seeks a momentary step backwards from the dominant *ratio* of the globalized rural economy, in such a way as to understand and perhaps learn to live, finally, rather than to merely remain blind to the conditions of life/death. That moment emerges as Amanda begins to recall an early morning visit to the main offices of the Sotomayor Soy Farm where her neighbor Carla works. Workers are unloading barrels from a truck and Amanda and her daughter Nina sit together on the grass to observe. David is immediately attentive to what is

happening to mother and daughter, even though they themselves remain oblivious: '*Es esto . . . esto es lo importante*' he says (62), and he asks what the rescue distance was between mother and daughter at that time. '*Estoy sentada a diez centímetros de mi hija, David, no hay distancia de rescate*', Amanda replies (63). Nina stands up, however, and notices that her legs and rear end are soaked. '*Es el rocío*', Amanda says immediately. David, however, recognizes that this is not morning dew but the beginning of Amanda's imminent passage to death. Amanda stands up and realizes that she too is soaking wet. '*Pero es rocío. Creo que es rocío*', she says (67), unaware of her reality. David, however, thinks otherwise; '*No es rocío*' (67). Amanda mistakes poison for the morning dew and seals her fate by choosing to do nothing. It is at this point that David accompanies Amanda down hospital stairwells and through hallways to a waiting room, where he insists that she be conscious of what happened and of the consequences of her inaction: '*Ya hablamos del veneno, de la intoxicación . . . No es verdad. Es verdad. Pero yo no lo sé, todavía no lo sé. Lo sabés. Pero no lo entendés. Me estoy por morir. Sí . . . Si te concentrás, las cosas suceden más rápido . . . No es tan malo morir*' (79-86).

For David the signifier 'rocío' names the uncanny truth and lived experience of the contemporary *Gestell*, in which a supposedly natural phenomenon is, without forewarning, unconcealed as a poisonous scientific and economic power. Amanda, however, remains oblivious to the enigma of this sinister experience of the Other, which assumes the form of a lack of significance in her everyday perceptions of the world. For this reason, she pays with her life for her inability or unwillingness to perceive and measure the proximate distance between the body, the most banal of actions—sitting down, standing up, touching the damp grass, kissing her daughters' hands, not seeing, not doing anything—, and the everyday injunctions of collective and individual danger and tragedy. David, however, is there to puncture and disrupt Amanda's oblivion as his questions force her to contemplate the

constellation of her past actions and words, and to see herself once again in light of her imminent devastation, finally devoid of all fantasy and belief ('Me estoy por morir'. *Sí*). She is forced to take notice and to see what she has not done, and how blind she has been to the truth of her situation. Nina had stood up and told her mother: 'Estoy empapada', and Amanda had responded: 'A ver ...'. In the present, Amanda adds, '—la tomo de la mano y la hago girar . . . —Es el rocío—le digo, ahora con la caminata se seca'. David interrupts to de-naturalize the banality of the moment, in which Amanda sees herself seeing without understanding; '*Es esto. Este es el momento*'. But Amanda still refuses to see: 'No puede ser, David, de verdad no hay más que esto' (64). David responds, '*Así empieza*', to which Amanda, who is only now seeing the impossible sight that is now threatening her, can only respond 'Dios mío' (64). Only now is she aware of the fact that her being-towards-death, which cannot be appropriated, instrumentalized, or taken away from her, is the only consciousness that remains. In this sense, David is there to signal a differential, infrapolitical, praxis that is designed to bring Amanda to see the *nihil*—the unrepresentable destitution—that underlies all her prior perceptions and fantasies of presence, security, safety, care, calculation, and reproduction.

At the end of the novel, however, the order of silent oblivion persists. Upon her demise Amanda's husband abandons the city to travel to take his daughter Nina, who has survived, back home from the rural hospital. However, he remains utterly oblivious to the imminent danger enclosed in his everyday surroundings, actions, and existential attachment to the contemporary *Gestell*:

*No se detiene en el pueblo. No mira hacia atrás. No ve los campos de soja, los riachuelos entretejiendo las tierras secas, los kilómetros de campo abierto, las villas y las fábricas, llegando a la ciudad. No repara en que el viaje de vuelta se ha ido haciendo más y más lento. Que hay*

*demasiados coches, coches y más coches cubriendo cada nervadura de asfalto. Y que el tránsito está estancado, paralizado desde hace horas, humeando efervescente. No ve lo importante: el hilo finalmente suelto, como una mecha encendida en algún lugar; la plaga inmóvil a punto de irritarse (124).*

In the end ‘el hilo’, which throughout the novel has functioned as a metaphor of calculation, containment, care, and safety, now uncovers its other side: it denotes the tipping point of decontainment, the uncanny sense that something is already becoming undone and that time is running out; it signals the reality of the obscure yet impending danger of the rescue distance’s inexistence, and perhaps even the demise of an entire order of, and faith in, reason, calculation, development, industrial progress, and control.

Oblivion rather than consciousness in the face of imminent danger is the support of the instituting arrangement—of the overriding *arche*—of the technological world, its system of means and ends, and its public order. Denial, in other words, is the normative hegemonic appropriation of the entire contemporary *Gestell*. And there is nothing more banal or tragic than that nihilism.

*Distancia de rescate* uncovers the fact that the time of the rescue distance—the epoch of its imaginary perception—has already run its course and continues to do so. What, then, can depose oblivion’s hegemonic appropriation now? In *El inconsciente, la técnica y el discurso capitalista*, Néstor A. Braunstein poses the following question: ‘¿Cabe oponerse al futuro no en nombre del pasado sino en nombre del futuro mismo? La pregunta—como se ve—no es filosófica; es política . . . por lo tanto, filosófica en el mejor sentido de la palabra, orientada al saber-vivir de la especie’ (108). I would add that the question is, in fact, infrapolitical, rather than political, and that it speaks directly to the question of an intellectual praxis

not invested in the essentially humanist conjuration between the past and the present in the name of a redemptive political reason to come. In *Distancia de rescate* David is the infrapolitical, phantasmatic practitioner who confronts the abyss as the originary site of the truth of being. In David's questions, self-consciousness is not the basis for the establishment of a hegemony or of a normative principle of thinking or organizing. Rather, consciousness for David is indistinguishable from being-towards-death, and his function in *Distancia de rescate* is to guide the singular trajectory of Amanda's passage through life toward that perception and understanding without coercive, utopian, or millennial intentions. David seeks to think otherwise than in the service of the epochal hegemony that is anthropogenic oblivion and value extraction, and his incursion into anxiety, this infrapolitical inroad into the existential enclosure that is assigned to those living in the kingdom of the soybean, seeks to challenge the apparent ordinariness of an epoch that 'continues to arrange everydayness in accordance with the morphology of the same and its inexhaustible ruses of subsumption' (Schürmann, 2003: 522).

For this reason, what *Distancia de rescate* offers the infrapolitical imagination in the age of anxiety is the realization that what remains for praxis is not the way the past comes into the present in the hope of a differential future. It is slightly different. It is the quest for an infrapolitical, existential passage that traverses the enclosure of the contemporary *Gestell* in such a way as to take it 'up to its very boundaries and to trace the internal disturbances of its arrangements' (Schürmann, 2003: 522). This infrapolitical operation of internal withdrawal is extended, as Néstor Braunstein indicates and as Samanta Schweblin's *Distancia de rescate* outlines, in opposition to the future (for contemporary oblivion dictates that the future will be merely the arrival of new principles built on the reproduction of those of the past and present), and simultaneously in the name of the future itself (that is, in the



name of a differential, an-archic take on the limit of life/death, of learning to live, finally).

*Finally*

Infrapolitical praxis works on behalf of a decision consistent with the question of being itself, and is consistent, therefore, with the 'saber-vivir de la especie' (Braunstein). It questions the domain of techno-scientific domination and on-going climate collapse that has been extended incessantly across the planet by both the master discourse of modernity and by the capitalist discourse of the contemporary *Gestell*. For while those discourses have been extended in the name of civilizational happiness, the so-called freedom of the subject, and the virtues of surplus value, all that humanist time of progress is running out fast.

There can be little doubt that in the Anthropocene we are witnessing the collapse of the mystical veils of modern history inherited from the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. We are beginning to realize, though obviously too late, that technics can no longer conceal the fact that, as Adorno put it in *Minima Moralia*, 'wrong life cannot be lived rightly' (1997: 39). In 1975 Pier Paolo Pasolini provided us with a point of departure that, rather than political, is infrapolitical, existential, as he closed his epistle on the disappearance of the fireflies with the following calibration: 'I would give all of Montedison for a firefly' (in Did-Huberman, 2018: 15). A half-century later it is incumbent on us to address the issue that Pasolini raises in the end. The Anthropocene opens a path not toward the gates of absolute knowledge, but toward the question regarding the crumbling of a certain understanding of human experience. We are no longer in the modern epoch of heliotropic self-certainty grasping itself in its coming to presence, that is, in the epoch of the modern metaphysics of the cogito and its techno-industrialized progress. Rather, for decades we have been crossing unwittingly the threshold of an

epochless epoch dominated by the calculations of planetary technics.

The present stirs the contours of a knowledge that is not yet known, and that is replete nevertheless with the unfamiliarity of a planetary 'not-being-at-home' [*das Nichtzu Hause-sein*] that rises already to the fore before our limited understanding. The only question is whether we are up for the task of taking it for what it is or not. This is where both the Real and *being-towards-death*—the experience of an uncanny unhomeliness before the *Other*—intertwine, and where it is revealed that anxiety is in fact the central affect around which everything is organized in terms of both symptoms and potential critical inroads. For this reason alone, the task at hand is to learn to engage with epochal anxiety against all the signs of the future, in the name of the future, infrapolitically, on behalf of existence. The alternative is just the sustained melancholy of the political functionaries of modernity, their dilapidated traditions, and their tired articles of faith.

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<sup>i</sup> It should be noted here that Martin Heidegger's understanding of *Gestell* and Michel Foucault's notion of *dispositif* are not synonymous. They are certainly interconnected, since they both assign place and positionality to thinking and acting, but they do not denote the same conceptual topography, or constellation of truth. Foucault's *dispositif* comprises (socially, historically, and institutionally) 'the discursive and extra-discursive forces that have assigned subjects to a restricted residence where they could constitute themselves. Those heteronomous forces circumscribe narrowly the field of autonomous self-constitution' (Schürmann, 2018: 22). Heidegger's notion of *Gestell*, meanwhile, denotes the enframing, positioning, or requisitioning that inserts humanity as a mode of presence into a binding epochal order of being, or metaphysics: 'It used to be the awesome task of philosophers to secure an organizing first principle to which theoreticians of ethics, politics, law, and so forth could look so as rationally to anchor their own discourse. These points of ultimate moorage provide legitimacy to the *principia*, the propositions held to be self-evident in the order of intelligibility. They also provide legitimacy to the *princeps*, the ruler or the institution retaining ultimate power in the order of authority . . . A principle like the sensible substance for Aristotle, the Christian God for the Medievals, the cogito for the moderns has its ascent, its period of reign, and its ruin' (Schürmann, 2018: 33). Foucault's thinking uncovers the ways in which the history of being exists socially, divergently, in the epoch of the cogito. Currently, however, the age of planetary technological domination and climate collapse—that is, the contemporary *Gestell*—denotes the ruin of the modern principle and metaphysical mode of presence of the epoch of the cogito in its entirety. In this sense the contemporary *Gestell* denotes the ruination of the methodological principles underlying Foucault's epochal historicism.

<sup>ii</sup> Why concern oneself with anxiety? It is well known that in Hegel knowledge is the real subject matter, the *actual* knowledge of what *truly* is. In contrast, *anxiety* refers to a *path* not toward the gates of absolute knowledge, but toward the question regarding the crumbling of a certain understanding of experience. It is not the movement of unconditional self-certainty grasping itself in its coming to presence, but the underlying ground for the emergence of a knowledge that is not known, that is, for the unfamiliarity, for the 'not-being-at-home' [*das Nichtzu Hause-sein*], or of a non-consciousness, that comes to the fore before understanding. This is where both the unconscious and *being-towards-death*—as a relation of uncanny unhomeliness before the *Other*—uncover the fact of *Lacan always with Heidegger*. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger posits that 'attunement' and understanding are the fundamental *existentialia* for 'the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world'. It is via such *existentialia* that, Heidegger continues, language becomes our theme for the first time, for discourse is existentially equiprimordial with

attunement and understanding (2010: 155). Heidegger intimates that 'That about which one has anxiety is being-in-the-world as such' (180). In this sense, anxiety in Heidegger is precisely where the relation between the ontic and the ontological converge. From this, we can conjecture that for Heidegger 'attunement' or, in this case, the affect of anxiety, can present itself again and again in language, as the marker of a temporal and existential conundrum in the relation between language and understanding precisely because it cannot represent. Anxiety is the ontic trace and intimation of the ontological difference, the expression of the *within* of the ontological difference, which comes to language precisely on account of its relation of lack to representation. In his 1962-63 seminar on *Anxiety*, Lacan proposes not a confrontation with but a re-articulation of anxiety in *Being and Time*, which, as already suggested, is portrayed as the 'attunement' of a relation of lack to absolute knowledge, and therefore of lack to the absoluteness of the absolute. Explicitly contrary to Freud, anxiety in Lacan is the path that remains always in light of an object, rather than in light of the loss of an object. Lacan counters the symbolic order predicated on lack, or castration. In other words, against Hegel and Freud, and re-orienting *thrownness*, or *being-towards-death*, in the direction of everyday subjective destitution from the order of the symbolic, what is proposed by Lacan via *anxiety* is both the signal, and the promise of a path in the direction of, not only an infrapolitical register in thinking, but also of an infra-psychoanalytical move away from the Imaginary, in the direction of the Real. Global capitalist discourse inaugurates a shift in the form and function of the Other, and of the desire of the Other. In my objectification, in the spirit of objectification that has shifted in relation to an Other that itself has shifted beyond all recognition, what is uncovered is *anxiety*: a shift in 'Being-in-the-world' dominated not by a question of recognition, *what is the desire of the Other*, but by a question for something else, *what 'objet a' am I for the desire of the Other?* The shift is slight, and yet devastating.

<sup>iii</sup> Let us not forget that in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1939) Freud utilized the lens of humanity's instinctive aggressiveness to counter Marx's understanding of the resolution of human alienation via the proletarian revolution. This led him to wonder, on the cusp of world war, in what direction Soviet revolutionary violence would channel its energies upon the downfall of the bourgeois property system (Freud, 2018: 66-7).