

Responsibility Toward the Planetary Nothing: For Infrapolitical Preparation

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In the current planetary reality, we cannot ignore our constant immersion in the unknown and the fact that we are entering ‘terra incognita’ at every step. This aspect has been emphasized by international figures such as Christopher Hewitt, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) director of climate services, and Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in a recent statement on the unprecedented weather events occurring on the planet. In the words of Guterres, ‘the situation we are witnessing now is the demonstration that climate change is out of control.’ (2023).

In the present paper, I explore the human existential situation regarding the current extreme weather events in terms of being held out into the ‘errancy of the nothing’ that is neither local nor global (Badiou, 2007: 59) and thereby remains planetarily undetectable. The wandering aspect of the nothing that Alain Badiou highlights denotes the anonymous movement of the unrepresentable that underlies every situation: ‘...[E]very situation implies the nothing of its all. But the nothing is neither a place nor a term of the situation.’ It is the ‘phantom of inconsistency’: ‘the name of unrepresentation in presentation’ (2007: 58).

The nothing, as the spectral movement of the unrepresentable, can be paralleled with Martin Heidegger’s nihilating nothing. The nothing nihilates, he says, without our knowing it: ‘The nothing nihilates

incessantly without our properly knowing of this occurrence in the manner of our everyday knowledge' (2009a: 92). In other words, it happens or extends beyond what we can know about our situation, marking that which does not make it into the 'public superficies of our existence' (92). In both cases, the nothing gestures toward the undetected movement of unpresentation: the extension of each situation to the unknown.

Arguably, Badiou and Heidegger are thinkers who do not seek to counter nihilism but to turn it into its essence, which remains forgotten by nihilism itself (Heidegger 2009b: 319). To think of existence as an immersion into the uncharted territory of the current climatic reality also implies immersing into the essence of the nothing—in our case, the planetary nothing—that extends to every level of being.

This extraordinary situation thus bears witness to existence as a lack of rootedness to which only atmospheric anxiety, an anxiety attuned to the absence of *oikos* informing existence, can acclimate us. Thus, I argue that atmospheric anxiety is the path to a sense of responsibility toward the planetary nothing, or that which does not appear in the public realm of existence. This responsibility calls for an infrapolitical preparation for the effects of a generic and anonymous reality such as climate change, which advances blindly over all of us. Accordingly, I thematize infrapolitical preparation as a vigilant immersion into this reality that overflows existence beyond all names, a mode of staying awake to an existence in the nameless.

However, this is not an ordinary state of awakesness but a rare one that gestures toward what lies underneath the surface of existence. Accordingly, this

paper is inscribed within antiphilosophy, which strives to present what remains unrepresentable (Moreiras, 2022: 45). As such, it aims to think that dimension of being that is held up in an *infracendence*ⁱ of sorts, venturing into an intra-nihilistic form of reflection.

I. Antiphilosophy or the Path of Intra-Nihilistic Thinking

Badiou describes as ‘wakeful’ a thought that ‘obtains no grasp whatsoever on the below-the-presentable’ (2007: 37). Wakeful thought thus stays on the surface of presence, disregarding what remains below it. This thinking is an ‘ignorant rejection of the nothing that belongs to the essence of being’ (Heidegger, 2022: 42), focusing only on beings or that to which a value can be assigned with transparency.

For Heidegger, transparency is what the ‘first luminosity of wonder, which had knowledge only of obscurity, has become’ (1994: 168); that is, the luminosity, after having lost all ties with the knowledge of the obscure, has given way to a transparency that has spread among human beings with the utmost indifference to being (169) and thus to nothing. Wakeful thought is, therefore, in Nietzsche’s words, a ‘mild and tranquil kind of thinking’ (2018: 211) that remains on the surface of what is clearly seen and experienced, ignoring the unconscious or the nothing that remains as a limitless dream of being. In this sense, wakeful thought arguably bears the imprint of nihilism.

Thinking awake to the forgetful ignorance of the nothing of being is thinking according to an impossible awokeness within the ordinary wakeful state of nihilism; that is, an awokeness passed over by that thinking that, contrary to its name, rests inadvertently

on plain forgetfulness. This rare awakes allows for an *intra-nihilistic* way of thinking that steps back toward 'the neglect of the nothing, which comes from nihilism's incapacity to grasp its own essence' (Heidegger, 2022: 44). The intra-nihilistic is thus an attempt to think what remains forgotten beneath the layer on which wakeful thought rests in complete tranquility. Only in this way can we lay the groundwork for the abandonment of nihilism: 'Turning in into its essence is the first step through which we may leave nihilism behind' (Heidegger, 2009b: 319). The intra-nihilistic path is thus not only a step back toward the essence of nihilism but also a step aside toward a form of thinking other than nihilism.

This other form cannot pass through 'philo-sophy' or any friendly pursuit of knowledge caught up in the academic race toward the mastery of a particular object of thought, as if thinking was just a matter of 'driving thru' something. Such alternative thinking must be anti-philo-sophical. As Moreiras points out, antiphilosophy 'tires itself out in the unproductive attempt to present the unpresentable' (2022: 45). As a result, it stays with the undecidable nature that traverses the nothing of being—the inaccessible access of being, or the 'unpresentable access, thus non-access, to this access' (Badiou, 2007: 59). Antiphilosophy is therefore non-ontological in that it thinks in the vicinity, or on the edge, of the abyssal nothingness of being. It is not compromised by the limits of a logic that aims to take us far from that edge and bind us to being as an accessible and thinkable support—a consistency that pervades all of life. As such, antiphilosophy thinks awake to the non-accessible edge of being and does not attempt to place us in a clear situation in relation to it. Instead, it opens us up to the existential dis-placement into the

unconscious extension of being, that is, to our 'being held out into the nothing' (Heidegger, 2009a: 91).

II. Atmospheric Anxiety and the Planetary Nothing

This state of dis-placement is characterized by a 'concealed anxiety' (Heidegger, 2009a: 93) that acts as a secret attunement to the nothing of being. This concealment manifests anxiety's lack of a proper origin: it 'is not at all 'inside' some interiority [...] but for the same reason is not at all outside either' (Heidegger, 1995: 66). It merges with the indeterminacy of the nothing of being, giving way to an indistinguishable 'atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case and which attunes us through and through' (67). Anxiety is anonymous and vague, with a ubiquitous character that cannot be contextualized or rooted properly (Griffero, 2018: XV).ⁱⁱ It is thus 'without a true, identifiable, anchoring point' (42), reflecting the 'no-man's-land' (43) where humans dwell. Atmospheric anxiety acknowledges the absence of rootedness as that which existentially informs the human, acclimatizing the latter to existence as it extends unconditioned, without *oikos*, into the unknown of planetary nothingness.

The adjective 'planetary' situates the nothing as 'neither local nor global, but scattered all over, nowhere and everywhere' (Badiou, 2007: 59); it 'wanders' undetected 'within the whole of a situation' as its very inconsistency (61; emphasis added). This wandering sense can be found in the word 'planetary' itself, which comes from the Greek verb *planasthai* ('to wander'). Being thrown into planetary nothingness thus points to the lack of stability or place determining the trajectory of being; or that being goes through 'the errancy of the nothing' (59) at every step. Being then implies a recurrent dis-placement that leaves it

without a foothold or support. Hence, it is only 'experienceable' within the undetected movement of the nothing as a 'phantom of inconsistency' (58). This experience is, *pace* Badiou, non-ontological, in that it does not prevent one from approaching the non-accessible access of being but rather opens one up to the omnipresent existence of the nothing that spectrally pervades the path of being. Accordingly, it is an immersion into the unlocatable inconsistency of existence—an *experientia vaga* that reflects the present planetary reality that leads the human out into 'terra incognita'.

As Hewitt, the abovementioned WMO director of climate services, stated about the heat waves currently affecting the planet, 'We are in *uncharted territory* and we can expect more records to fall as El Niño develops further and these impacts will extend into 2024.' (2023). The extreme weather events occurring as a consequence of El Niño prove that the planetary boundaries have been crossed, and we are now on a planet that is *wandering* away from us on an unimaginable scale. The insurmountable errancy of the planet thus 'out-scales' its boundaries and leaves us facing the unknown as part of our path of being. Being has no foothold or anything to hold on to. It is thus suspended in the planetary nothing, a situation to which only anxiety can attune us through its atmospheric indeterminacy.

III. A Responsibility Beyond Reading

The talk of the planetary nothing of being may be unbearable for the exegetical type embedded in the text of Badiou or Heidegger. However, it is the unbearable itself, the new out of both thinkers, that antiphilosophy attempts to think. Hence, in the task at hand, there is no textual object *per se* to dispute; that

is, the main aim is not to perform a reading from within Heidegger or Badiou but ‘to read’ against the very limitation that reading imposes on the reader. This task goes beyond the exegetical view, which is always determined by the boundaries of the text(s) and trapped in its eternal traces in a kind of radical hermeneutic or hermetic exercise. Such a view, Heidegger notes, does not allow for a different ‘seeing’: a phenomenological one that focuses on the inapparent matter of things (2012: 89). This seeing informs a post-academic task concerned with what lies outside the library:ⁱⁱⁱ the unbearable or ‘the most monstrous’ of all (Heidegger, 2022: 52)—the planetary nothing of being that wanders, gesturing toward an unknowable and *unreadable* reality.

Thus, faced with the extra-academic reality of the current climate emergency, antiphilosophy bears the responsibility of thinking about the uncharted territory of being, a responsibility that marks the end of wakeful thought—in any of its forms (i.e., philosophy, ontology, etc.)—and its indifference toward the nothing. Such a responsibility cannot be thought of in terms of the imputation of a response to a specific event that takes place in a moment (*kairos*) of vision or clarity;^{iv} it can only arise from a moment of absolute non-vision, marking the impossibility of putting into practice any assigned response or acquired knowledge.

This responsibility concerns the recurring moment of being in the planetary nothing: our immersion into the emerging effects of a reality that ‘out-scales’ us in its totality. This responsibility can only arise out of the dark or the ‘night of non-knowledge’ (Spivak, 1994: 21–22), that is, in recognition of the impossibility of having access to or *reading* into such a reality. It is only possible in the face of the non-accessible access to a

reality that only manifests in its form of radical exteriority.

This reality marks 'the indiscernible or generic' that concerns us all. The indiscernible, or generic, is what Badiou defines as an event. It is that which is essentially 'lost sight of' and hence 'remains indiscernible' or, as Badiou likes to say, 'generic'. Therefore, 'it is not itself something that can be known in a perfectly determined way.' (Tarby, 2013: 144). Its generic nature disregards the singularity of difference altogether, triggering an atmosphere of sameness in which all fall into *indifference*. We are equal in the face of it: no one escapes this reality whose inconsistency is unpredictable and which, from its 'dimension of essential anonymity,' haunts all existence (Romano, 2016: 58). For Claude Romano, haunting anonymity is the excess of impersonality emerging from the event, which precedes any sense of mineness (66) or, in the present case, of difference. Therefore, the event of such a reality arguably concerns no one, yet it affects everyone. Accordingly, no one is primarily or secondarily concerned: we are all held out into the planetary nothing and the phantom of its inconsistency, unbeknownst even to ourselves.

The responsibility of thinking the unbearable opens up existence as 'affected' by the radical indifference of the climatic reality that 'out-scales' the particularity of the subject. This is the reality that politics leaves unthought insofar as it keeps scaling back to the subject and remains on the kairological surface of life, the surface of mineness or difference; in other words, insofar as it extends as the impression of the wakeful thought of nihilism. The responsibility to think the unbearable is to be 'attentive' to that which does not transcend to 'the public superficialities of our existence' (Heidegger, 2009a: 92), namely, that below-the-

presentable, or ‘the absolute unconscious,’ of being (Badiou, 2007: 60).

Therefore, such responsibility means being awake to that which precisely the wakeful, mild, and tranquil thinking of politics ignores: the infrapolitical dimension of existence. It is awake to the impossible awakens of the ordinary wakeful state from within politics. This responsibility is arguably an infrapolitical gesture toward the unthought condition of an Other politics, or the Other within politics that politics itself is-not (Moreiras, 2021: 194–5). This impolitical politics turns to the radical exteriority of the wandering nothing that places us here and now in a context of total indifference. In other words, this politics is concerned with that which does not concern the subject: the indifference that overflows existence.

IV. Infrapolitical Preparation

How should we prepare for such otherness? Is preparation even possible? How should we even think of ‘preparation’? Preparation comes from *prae* (‘before’) and *parare* (‘to make ready’), which derives from the PIE root *pere-* (‘to grant, allot’). Preparation can therefore be thought of in essential terms as a granting that takes place beforehand, an act of granting or giving that takes the form of a step back. Infrapolitical preparation is a step back from politics that grants it a distance from itself into its impolitical condition—that which is withheld from the political and cannot be considered politically given—the un-given of the given.

Political preparation does not touch on infrapolitical preparation. The former militantly focuses on the state of things that determine the subject’s life with respect to its kairological character, namely, the life of

the visual instant in which the subject is inscribed. Conversely, the latter concerns that which remains outside the kairological occasion of life and does not come to be within the realm of mineness or difference. Infrapolitical preparation thus poses a challenge to political preparation, as it gestures toward the impolitical or extra-political reality of indifference; a reality that is without an opportunity to visibly emerge into existence but nonetheless affects and even overflows existence itself. Is this not the challenge facing politics today: the challenge of preparing for an event, such as climate change, that does not emerge 'as such' on any given occasion and is never visually available as a whole? That is, an event that is 'as silent and discreet as the fact is noisy and gaudy' (Romano, 2016: 55), but whose silent totality engulfs us all?

In order to prepare for such an event, we must step back *from* any sense of political militancy and turn *toward* the planetary nothing of being that overrides the particularity of this or that thing in relation to this or that person. Accordingly, to prepare is to be attuned to a sense of genericness or anonymous impersonality that indifferently affects everyone. By withdrawing from the realm of the subject, infrapolitical preparation turns to the planetary aspect of existence, which is always already exposed to an extreme climatic event that blindly wanders over all human beings. It affirms a coming excess of indifference that simultaneously informs and threatens us. It calls for vigilant attentiveness to indifference, which extends to every step of our being.

Vigilant attentiveness, rarely present in our ordinary lives, can sometimes arise in moments of atmospheric anxiety or awareness. This seems to be the case in the situation depicted in an image from the Ukrainian conflict, taken by John Moore, an American

photographer who specializes in international border and warship conflicts, in the city of Kupiansk in March 2023. At the time, a fierce battle was raging between the Ukrainian and Russian sides over the capture of Kupiansk, and NGOs volunteered to evacuate people from the site. The picture shows a man standing by the window, looking outside, waiting for the rescue team to arrive. There is no clear view of what is outside, only a grayish-white color. The vagueness of such a view reflects the indeterminacy of the warship situation at that time—the phantom of inconsistency that haunts him and his son, who looks at him completely unaware.

The father's gaze, alert to the latency of what has not yet emerged, reflects a state of vigilant attentiveness that bears the impossible witness of a secret event. He thus 'sees' the impending anonymity of an event that overflows the surface of his life and keeps him in a context of total indifference. Although this image is not related to extreme weather events, it shows a gaze that trespasses the visuality of the everyday kairological moment and remains alert to the non-visual, watching 'for the night and the unlimited obscurity' (Jean-Luc Nancy, 2021: 109). This moment of infrapolitical preparation attests to a rare state of awakeness that 'knows' about the sustaining anonymity of existence or our being in the face of indifference.



Photograph: John Moore/Getty Images, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2023/mar/10/the-week-around-the-world-in-20-pictures>

Is being indifferent, then, what is proposed here? Indifference means the absolute, unmarked aspect of the situation in which we existentially find ourselves, that which cannot be absorbed by any known or future difference. It signals the suspension of existence in the unknown. Therefore, indifference is arguably the primary aspect of existence: the constant exposure to that which cannot be made out, persisting as the very impossibility of difference itself—the inexistence of existence that *desists* at every opportunity of vital insistence.^v Accordingly, the preparation for the planetary nothing consists in taking responsibility for that which does not enter the paradigm of difference and threatens its very existence from a position of radical exteriority—the indifference of the nothing that wanders toward us as the impossible possibility of existence itself.

Hence, what is proposed is not a matter of being indifferent, which would be precisely living according to difference and the surface of life. That will certainly

not help in heeding the wandering nothing. Rather, as a mode of infrapolitical preparation, we must remain attentive to our being thrown out of difference into the planetary event of the nothing.

Conclusion: Toward a Non-Secular Path

Infrapolitical preparation must not be mistaken as a mere act or performance, always subjected to the decision or will of the subject. Instead, it is an immersive experience into indifference whose beginning cannot be calculated, denoting a concealed inceptuality that overrides the centrality of the subject.

Thus, infrapolitical preparation is arguably the path to inceptual immersion into indifference, which awakens us to the impossibility of ever stepping outside of indifference and claiming a state of absolute or radical difference (even the most radical of differences is always already situated in indifference).^{vi} To ignore such an impossibility would be to remain forgetful of the outscaling indifference holding us out into the nothing of being. In other words, it would be a nihilistic rejection of *the nothing that belongs to the essence of being* (Heidegger, 2022: 42). Infrapolitical preparation is the path to an intra-nihilistic experience of being that may lead to abandoning nihilism. Therefore, preparing infrapolitically is to be inceptually immersed into the nothing as the indifferent essence of being, that is, to be attuned to the indifferent nothing at every step of our being.

To prepare for the abandonment of nihilism, then, is to attune ourselves to the anonymous excess of the nothing that pervades being; in other words, learning to 'exist in the nameless' as a way 'into the nearness of being' (Heidegger, 2009c: 243). The nameless

names that which planetarily 'out-scales' and affects us. It is the name of a concealed beginning that is always already ahead of us as the unbearable end of being. The beginning of the end is, like the end of the beginning, the nameless inconsistency of everyone's existential situation beyond all difference.^{vii} This inconsistency, the non-coincidental coincidence between beginning and end, marks the immersion of being into the nothing: the existential immersion into indifference toward which infrapolitical preparation gestures.

However, this preparation is impossible as long as we are compromised by academic-secular thinking. It thus calls for a step outside academia in search of a nonsecular path of thinking. This path must be anonymous or embedded in the anonymity of the nameless name of existence that extends in 'the subtle voice of silence' (I Kings 19:11–12, as quoted by Zarader, 2006: 50). Nevertheless, in the present case, this voice is not that of a hidden God but of the primordial nothing closing in on us as we progress along our path. Such a path has not yet been defined and perhaps should remain undefined as a distinctive feature of its pathless character toward radical anonymity. It is indeed a complex one, being at the same time non-secular and non-ontological, manifesting a God-less in-between that marks a turn toward another beginning outside academic-secular thinking (Heidegger, 2012: 67-78). This pathless path must be undertaken if we are to prepare ourselves existentially for the intra-nihilistic experience of the planetary nothing. An additional step that crosses, in Badiou's terms, 'a space where nothing is given' (2008: 80).

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Endnotes

ⁱ The term ‘infracendence’ is a spectral term in nature. To say that it was coined by someone would only be falling into the trap of authorship. Infracendence defies the limits of authorship and evokes a spectral authority that increases the ambiguity of authorship itself. It belongs to the ‘Notebook of Alberto Moreira’, the uncle of Alberto Moreiras, Timoteo Moreiras, who uses the name of Moreiras’ grandfather as his heteronym. Infracendence is a countercartesian term that gestures to that which escapes thinking when I think (Moreiras, 2022: 113).

ⁱⁱ In his book *Quasi-Things: The Paradigm of Atmospheres*, Tonino Griffero presents his conception of feelings as atmospheres or quasi-things that affect us all the more the less real or localizable they are: ‘Despite the fact that they do not “exist” fully—that is, in the only sense contemplated by (scientific and sometimes even commonsensical) reductionism, the half-entities I thematize (atmospherically) act very powerfully on us. And this happens not *despite*, but precisely *thanks to* their attenuated physical reality.’ (2018: XV).

ⁱⁱⁱ In a presentation delivered at the North Texas Philosophical Association titled ‘Technological Thinking in the Anthropocene: Borges’ Library of Babel as a Figure of Calculation’, Rodrigo de los Santos used the image of Babel’s library from Borges’ short story ‘The Library of Babel’ as an allegory to reflect on the academic fixation on the book as ignorance of any sign of exteriority or extra-academic reality. De los Santos emphasized the need to think as a performance outside the academic attachment to the book and its endless exegesis, especially in the current times of climate change. Turning away from the library is a post-academic task of thinking that takes responsibility for the unreadable exteriority of a reality as pressing as climate change.

^{iv} By ‘kairological moment’ I am referring to the Aristotelian occasion (*kairos*) that marks the subject’s possibility of acting and becoming an agent; that is, a moment that is never without decision. On the

relationship between *kairos* and the event, see: Romano, Claude. (2016) *There Is: The Event and the Finitude of Appearing*, 13.

^v In *Uncanny Rest*, Alberto Moreiras speaks of ‘the decision of inexistence’, an expression used by one of his interlocutors in the book, ‘Matías’, to refer to what he considers the negation of existence that results from Moreiras’ thought. Moreiras uses the expression to reverse what Matías wrongly believes to be true, stating that ‘the decision of inexistence’ is an affirmation of existence, as existence cannot cease to exist in any existing moment (2022: 77–78). That is, existence cannot be disentangled from inexistence; being cannot be separated from the nothing and its desistance. Moreiras uses the verb ‘desistence,’ borrowed from Arturo Leyte’s Spanish translation of the Heideggerian phrase ‘to nihilate’, to indicate that being is always already desisting or nihilating; being is held out into the nothing (2022: 34–35).

^{vi} Inceptual here is to be thought, as Heidegger points out in *The Event*, ‘intransitively’, that is, ‘not to begin (tackle, take hold of, undertake) something, but instead to be taken hold of by something (*in-cipere*)’ (2013: 154). In this sense, indifference has an (*in-cipit*) difference, not the other way around.

^{vii} The non-dichotomous relationship between beginning and end resulting from immersion into the nameless is, as Eliot R. Wolfson notes, an experience that is well known to the Hebraic tradition, which derives from the Kabbalistic Iberian line of thinkers (i.e., Moses Cordovero, Azriel de Girona, etc.). As an example in *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, Wolfson quotes the following passage from the Zoharic anthology: ‘*Ein sof*, which is the name of the nameless, ‘cannot be known and it does not produce an end or beginning like the primordial nothing, which brings forth a beginning and an end...There are no wills, no lights, and no radiances in *Ein Sof*’ (2019: 113). *Ein Sof* is thus another name for the utter indifference that cannot be named but to which we are all exposed inceptually.