

On a Newly Arisen Infrapolitical Tone in Theory¹

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In 1796, Immanuel Kant denounced the mystical excesses of those who proclaimed the end of philosophy in a piece titled “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy” (*Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*). Almost two hundred years later, Jacques Derrida delivered a lecture in Cerisy-la-Salle in which he imitates and parodies Kant's text: *On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy (D'un ton apocaliptique adopté naguere en philosophie*, 1982). Kant's text aims to address and oppose the *superior tone* that was being used by the mystagogues of his time: the mystics who transgress the bounds of human reason. In contrast, Derrida, who is more interested in the noun than in the adjective, focuses on the *apocalyptic tone* of the mystagogues that proclaim the end of man, of philosophy, and of modernity. The differences in style are important but minor. Kant is more concerned with the *superiority* than with the tone itself. Derrida, on the contrary, is more interested in the *tone* than in the apocalyptic. However, both texts are critical interventions, profound political claims, and are enlightened manifestos against the excesses of modern irrationalism. Derrida as an enlightened Kantian? Kant as a deconstructor of antiphilosophical mysticism? To answer these questions it is necessary not to give in to an argumentative vertigo: *Enlightenment* and *deconstruction* are two semantic devices that activate the political prejudices of theoretical practices. For this reason, it is not the aim of this text to present a theoretical lineage or a philosophical background. On the contrary, its objective is more modest because, instead of following the argumentative sequence of Kant or Derrida, the task in the following pages consists of anticipating a datum, a philosophical situation, a change in register regarding the relationship between thought and politics: the arrival of a newly arisen *infrapolitical* tone in theory.

Infrapolitics and theory are intermingled in experience, but theory by itself does not exist. Theory is always adjectival theory, theory of “something”: theory of the object, theory of literature, theory of philosophy; even theory of theory. Hence, theory is a way of questioning phenomena, the objects of conscience, world and experience, but it also

constitutes an interrogation regarding the theoretical representations and the discursive practices with which we apprehend theoretical objects. Theory is a distance as well as a distancing from the world and, at the same time, it is appropriation and expropriation of life. Therefore, the infrapolitical tone that has been recently adopted in theory is capable of thinking the intersection, the limit, the frontier between theory and life. Institutionally, the infrapolitical tone does not just suppose a total change in the tone of philosophy, literary criticism or field studies; the change of tone is a change in the orientation of thought, a change in the fragile conceptual structure of theory, a change in the way in which discursive practices admit new horizons of experience.

From Superior Tone to Apocalyptic Tone

Kant is probably the last of the Enlightenment thinkers to place a normative trust in reason and the human race. His optimism in that regard stands in stark contrast to the extreme anthropological pessimism in which he frames his empirical investigations. For this reason, Kantian studies should not be reduced to the analysis of the three *Critiques*. There are important political concerns underlying the minor texts of one of the main critics of *Enlightenment critique*. *On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy* is a good example, for in it we see the extent to which, for Kant, in the impeachment of the mystagogues of reason, the *political* possibility of achieving an art of living in a cosmopolitan society hangs in the balance. In this text, Kant's concern is a political one, mediated by a philosophical discussion, for in order to expose his political stance (republican), he must propound a *politics of philosophy*, an intrinsic normativity to philosophical discourse that necessarily goes through a criterion of political selection.

Pace the liberal interpreters of Kant, the *politics of Kantian philosophy* are basically republican, cosmopolitan, and show a strong enlightened disenchantment. This implies that the philosophies that maintain aristocratic, nationalistic and romantic presuppositions are characterized as transgressing critical rationality. Thus, the Kantian opposition to the *mystagogues* of his time lies in the political implications of his philosophical practice: the *mystagogues* maintain a *distinguished* or *aristocratic* tone that is opposed to the *cosmopolitan* designs of reason. Hence, it is worth questioning the political limits of Kantian philosophy. Why does Kant denounce the aristocratic practices and simultaneously consider that the monarch is capable of embodying the spirit of the Enlightenment? Why is revolutionary

enthusiasm compatible with the condemnation of revolutionary violence? The answer to this apparent anthropological contradiction guides us to the political core of Kantianism: the historical mistrust of forms of domination that lack rationality.

Thus, the first political warning that Kant makes is not to be found in the emancipating imperative commonly associated with the Enlightenment project (*sapere aude*), but in the call for actuality that is demanded by critical thought. The Enlightenment critique is political critique because it thinks the conditions of the present. In this sense, Kant engaged in republican critique when he denounced the aristocratic excesses of some philosophical discourses. Particularly, in *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, Kant held that the *distinguished tone* is directly related to the possession of a secret (*philosophia arcana*) because access to the secret—which adopts the epistemic form of the thing in itself—constitutes a political transgression of the bounds of reason: it supposes the existence of *distinguished lords* capable of knowing and revealing the *arcana imperii*.

On the one hand, for the *distinguished lords* it is enough with their prestige, they are not obliged to account for anything because they are the direct beneficiaries of institutional power (Kant 53). This suggests that the philosophical attitude of the distinguished lords works to the detriment of civil equality (57). Furthermore, the *distinguished lords* are not *philosophers* because they abandon the critical attitude in order to be identified as owners of an elevated feeling that can be experienced without being exhaustively communicated. The substitution of reason for an “elevated feeling” is an aristocratic political strategy: “the principle of wanting to philosophize under the influence of a higher *feeling* is, among all principles, the one best suited to produce a superior tone” (58). As the principle of the “elevated feeling” contradicted the critical project, Kant proclaimed in an ironic gesture: “Long live philosophy drawn from feelings, a philosophy that leads us directly to the things themselves!” (58). The problem does not reside in the cognitive transgression of the understanding, but in abandoning the work of the concept in favor of the mystical presentiment of a *supersensible hunch*.

On the other hand, Kant explains why the philosophers who adopt the *tone of a great lord* carry out a mystical operation and, by extension, establish the *death of philosophy*; for without the work of the concept and of understanding, philosophy becomes the mere dreams of a visionary:

It is immediately apparent that intimation consists in a certain mysterious

rhythm [*mystischer Takel*], a vaulting leap (*salto mortale*) beyond concepts into the unthinkable, a capacity to grasp what evades every concept, an expectation of secrets or, rather, a suspense-ridden tendering of secrets that is actually the mistuning of heads into exaltation. For intimation is obscure pre-expectation and contains the hope of a disclosure that is only possible in tasks of reason solved with concepts. (Kant 61-62)

Concepts are thus the instrument to measure the communicative capacity of reason and the political inflow of a philosophical practice. However, philosophy and the public use of reason cannot be reduced to the conditioned scope of concepts because the hunch differs from the unconditioned. The former is founded upon a supersensible intuition free from universal concepts and the latter is based on an intellectual intuition justified by transcendental concepts. Finally, the *superior* or *distinguished* tone of the Kantian mystagogues, as it lacks the work of the concept and violates the principles of reason, substitutes philosophical knowledge for a “bold leap without effort” (69). This epistemic act rapidly leads to political action: the step from the mystery to the ministry. The care and the securing of the mystery depend on an institution that has the ability to closely protect this privileged information. The *great lords* are politicians dressed up as philosophers because, in spite of acting like the initiated and adopting a distinguished tone, they fall into a sentimental pedantry that is not worthy of the name philosophy. This critique of philosophical pedantry represents the culmination of Kant's politics of philosophy: a republican, enlightened and cosmopolitan project cannot support a philosophy based on mystery, secrets or dogmatic attitude towards the experience of others. The tone of the “puffed up” owners of this true mystery cannot be illustrious because it feeds only on dogmatic knowledge (69).

Kant concludes his text by claiming that, in order to avoid identifying oneself with the mystagogues, it is important to listen to the mystical singing of the distinguished lords in order to conjure the impossible tones of philosophical musicality. Philosophical music should be in tune with the cosmopolitan tonality of reason because what is at stake is the right to philosophy against the sovereignty of elevated feeling. Kant's final remark is ironic, as he states that nonetheless “we want to hear and appreciate the new tone of philosophizing (in which one can do without philosophy)” (57). Why is it necessary to listen to a new tone if each tone shuts down the possibility of philosophical creativity? Is the Kantian irony an enlightened gesture against the prestige of the distinguished lords or, on the contrary, is the

irony the last resort against political resentment? The answer, which is necessarily elliptic, depends upon the distinction between *distinguished tone* and *great lord*. The equivalence of both elements is possible because there is a personification of philosophy and an aristocratization of thought. The *great lord* may have a *distinguished tone* because he has abandoned philosophy in order to go into politics thanks to the power of *elevated feeling*. Kant's critique rests upon the political mechanism with which the mystagogues exclude philosophical argumentation from their field of discursive action. Therefore, the Kantian critique has an inevitable political component: the enlightened demand as a republican imperative.

In tune with the Kantian enterprise, Derrida made his own pronouncement on the mystagogues of his time. In 1980, during a colloquium organized by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in Cerisy-la-Salle, Derrida delivered a lecture titled *D'un ton apocaliptique adopté naguere en philosophie*. During the lecture, Derrida asked himself *what* is it that sets a tone, *what* anticipates a change or a rupture of tone? The initial problem resides in the property of hearing to which a tone alludes, an audible facet that writing would transform into silence. Tonality points to musicality. Tonality supposes hearing, the disposition of a listening ear. A tone cannot be transmitted by a written text, but this does not imply that a text cannot be heard. As we listen to a text, we apprehend the tone, the musicality with which it is rhetorically constructed; nevertheless, the tonality of a text differs from the style because it needs the acceptance of *ears*, so it can be heard. Style is frozen tonality and tone is a politics of hearing.

Additionally, if tone is different from style, it is worth noting why the concern regarding tone is not strictly speaking a rhetorical issue but a political practice. The politics of tone indicate a dispute regarding open ears, a silent battle to generate the conditions of audibility for what doesn't have hearers that can listen. In order to answer the question regarding the politicity of tones it is necessary to establish how the problem has been posed by modern philosophy. For modern philosophers, tone is either a technical problem or a subjective obstacle. Philosophical texts should make the tonal difference inaudible because tonal neutrality guarantees the approximation to truth and, therefore, constitutes one of the rhetorical imperatives of philosophical discourse. The *concept* must suppress the philosopher's *tone*. Tonality must be diluted, neutralized, eliminated from philosophical argumentation. Arguments ignore the body of whoever writes philosophy, and philosophy, as Derrida claims, follows an atonal norm. Conversely, for classical rhetoric, tone and philosophy are

not separable elements: a text is an extension of the body and an enlargement of tone because, for ancient philosophy, philosophical discourse is, fundamentally, oral communication. Ancient philosophers make themselves heard; modern philosophers read one another. But, what happens with the different tones that a theory may adopt? Does theory comply with the same auditory conditions that philosophical discourse imposes? Is theoretical philosophy atonal? The answer points to one of the core gestures of Derrida's writing: the critique of phonocentrism.

For Derrida, phonocentrism constitutes a modern gaze which is derived from the metaphysics of presence, a gaze in which implicit hierarchies operate that force orality to put itself above writing; unjustified gazes which grant importance to the author above the reader or the signified above the signifier. For this reason, in his reading of *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, Derrida warns us that Kant is not interested in *systematizing* the tone of philosophy but in denouncing a way of making philosophical pronouncements which employ what he does not consider to be “a very good tone.” Kant thinks it is not “a very good tone” because it signals “the end of philosophy” (*der Tod aller Philosophie*) in its preference for a mystical, supernatural or “exalted vision” (*schwärmerische Vision*) of human rationality (71). The exalted vision conforms a philosophical writing articulated as an elegy, a melancholy (non)conceptuality which is incapable of reaching the modalities of experience.

Accordingly, Derrida stresses that the tone that Kant bestows upon this position is polemical and satirical; that is, in the end, what is adopted is a political tone: “This is a social critique, and its premises have a properly political character. But if he derides a tone that announces the death of all philosophy, the tone in itself is not what is being mocked” (Derrida 124). For Derrida, it is important to assume that Kant is one of the first philosophers who explicitly denounce the necrotic discourses that turn to an apocalyptic tone in order to postulate the death of a discipline. The Kantian attack, however, is not focused on the apocalyptic element that is contained in those discourses, but rather in the alleged political and social benefit that these agents want to obtain from its proliferation. The politization of the death of philosophy is operated by the mystagogues: the “philosophers” who adopt an apocalyptic tone. The imposture of the mystagogues—Derrida focuses his analysis on the Kantian mystagogue's *mise en scene*—resides in their political use of philosophy. The mystagogue, who is a philosopher by initiation or by inspiration, elevates

his profile by assuming the position of a great lord (*Vorbeme halten*), an elite subject, a normative entity outside society. The mystagogue dismisses the patience of the concept and points to a direct connection with intellectual intuition; he assumes superiority with respect to others and exhibits himself as the police in the realm of science (*die Polizei im Reich der Wissenschaften*). The mystagogue unsuitably bestows the title of “philosopher” upon himself to garnish his tone of *great lord*, his *distinguished* tone, and to conceal his authentic passion: institutional power.

Finally, Derrida states that Kant confronts the mystagogues because they are not in tune with the time of the world, for they are incapable of philosophizing “in civil equality” (Derrida 129). The mystagogue rejects the work of the concept and disdains the patient commentary of a text, opting for a faster route to philosophical truth. In order to deal with the mystagogue's thrust, Kant points out the possibility of revenge from the professional philosophers, who err when they act as if they were the great lords. The philosopher, when he acquires the tone of a great lord or a tone of epistemic authority, becomes a thought policeman and, paradoxically, stops being a philosopher in order to operate as a prophet: he confuses reason with the voice of the oracle; he physicalizes thoughts for the sake of a truth which is only accessible to the initiated: “Their crime is properly political; it is a matter for [*relève de*] a kind of police” (129-30).

For Derrida, Kant indicates more than a textual strategy: he took a position with respect to the *politics of philosophy* and, for this reason, an affirmation of the impossible political horizon to modernity. It should be recalled that Derrida's lecture is from the beginning of the 1980s, immersed in byzantine debates on postmodernity. The exhaustion of the discussion about the end of modernity, in which Habermas accused Derrida of being a postmodern conservative, show how much the crisis of the modern is the consummation of a historic time to come. This explains the anger and firmness with which Derrida makes his pronouncement against the signs of end of time and the death of philosophy, because the apocalyptic tone is not a symptom of the speeches on the end of time, but the rhetorical strategy to position itself politically in discussions about the end of the Enlightenment as unfinished condition of the historical time of modernity. The new mystagogues, against whom Derrida is writing, are, therefore, advocates of the end of the Enlightenment and the end of philosophy as principles of political rationality.

Derrida discloses the political impulses of these false prophets, who have converted

to the political rhetoric of the end of times. For this reason, an attentive reader, a reader necessarily anachronistic, detects Derrida's warning about the ironic tone of the Kantian text; find out the philosophical impossibility of the new mystagogues and the apocalyptic reactivation of anti-apocalyptic criticism. This implies that the Derridean text not only takes an ironic tone, but that all criticism of apocalyptic speech is, ironically, an apocalyptic imposture. Writing about the revelation supposes an apocalyptic tone. The renunciation of discourses on the end of times is an ironic gesture that accepts an unusual enlightened attitude:

So we, *Aufklärer* of modern times, we continue to denounce the impostor Apostles, the "so-called envoys" not sent by anyone, the liars and unfaithful ones, the turgidity and the pomposity of all those charged with a historic mission of whom nothing has been requested and who have been charged with nothing. Shall we thus continue in the best apocalyptic tradition to denounce false apocalypses? (Derrida 158-59).

As a result, the denunciation of "the false revelation," ironically enunciated by Derrida, records the importance of demystifying the political charge of the apocalyptic ploys, exposing their conservatism. Underlying the tone of the apocalyptic end of philosophy—or even the post-apocalyptic tone that announces the end of the end—is a political sham that seeks the blessing of the powerful at the expense of the imagination of the people. Indeed, for Derrida apocalyptic rhetoric oscillates between the grossest apocalyptic conservatism and the most sophisticated cryptic strategy to evade political censorship:

And above all because the ethicopolitical motif or motivation of these stratagems is never reducible to some simple. I recall thus that their rhetoric, for example is not only destined to mislead the people rather than the powerful in order to arrive at retrograde, backward-looking, conservative ends. Nothing is less conservative than the apocalyptic genre. And as it is an apocalyptic, apocryphal, masked, coded genre, it can use the detour to mislead another vigilance, that of censorship. (Derrida 159)

Derrida responds directly to the new mystagogues who accuse him of putting apocalyptic themes back on the philosophical agenda. The answer, less elliptical but more ironic than others have offered before, indicates that it is directed almost exclusively at the American reception of his work, since it is supported by the U.S. apocalyptic culture, "where people

are always more sensitive to phenomena of prophetism, messianism, eschatology, and apocalypse-here-now” (160). However, Derrida maintained a permanent discussion with the Americanized mystagogues, regardless of their philosophical quality. From John Searle to Jürgen Habermas, philosophical disagreement has been part of the political and philosophical reception of deconstruction. With this public appearance, deconstruction adopted a controversial tone, a belligerent tone, a reactive tone. It prompted a hasty American domestication, but it also did not help in changing the fact that it lacked a major audience in Foucault’s France. One of the most abundant accusations of the mystagogues was that Derrida was an apolitical character, and that deconstruction necessarily entailed a depoliticization. Motivated by this epochal gesture, Derrida began, more and more directly, to write about political issues—not that the “grammatological phase” of deconstruction was not interested in politics—which centered on the importance of a *radical enlightenment*, the slogan of *the lights to come* and, which, gave the lie to the criticism of deconstruction as an advanced irrationalism or nihilism.

The Infrapolitical Tone and the New Mystagogues

Above, I state that there is an infrapolitical tone adopted in theory. This tone arises as a vindication of theory, but one that is marginal to disciplinary politics. Infrapolitics emerges, then, as a (de)political practice in the current economic and political conditions of the neo-liberal University, which is the reason why it is not only a theoretical model or a reading strategy, but part of a deconstructive practice that rejects the domestication and depoliticization of the American reception of deconstruction. In fact, infrapolitics is part of the history of deconstruction, but not of the American history of deconstruction. Although infrapolitics is intricately related to discussions stemming from Latin American studies, it is not aimed at that field exclusively, as it has a strong cosmopolitan and marrano thrust. Infrapolitics is, therefore, a form of deconstruction, but it is not only an epigonal offshoot of the work of Derrida. For this reason, infrapolitics rejects the ethical and political overdetermination of deconstruction.

Before touching on the texture of the infrapolitical tone, it is necessary to locate the current “anti-deconstructive” climate as a political, more than a critical, gesture made by the new mystagogues. The contemporary mystagogue is the policeman of academic correctness: the censor of proper forms who appeals to philology, positive science and the humanistic

tradition in order to announce the downfall and inoperability of theory. The mystagogue confuses the power of knowledge with the knowledge of power because it is not an exclusive agency, nor specific to a discipline or institution. On the contrary, the mystagogue is a type of political agent of an academic practice, who aspires to be an organic or inorganic intellectual, who uses any means to politicize his own ends or to rule out alternatives of intellectual production whenever they are theoretical. He is interested in politics, literature or theory in order to prove that there is a consistency between his elevated and distinguished tone and his political practices and intellectual habits. The mystagogue is a knowledge-aristocrat who reigns but does not govern because his “indiscreet arrogance” exposes him politically, which renders him vulnerable even as it fosters suspicion.

Nevertheless, the contemporary mystagogue is not easily identifiable or recognizable because this practice is not an action or a property of a subject, but an incorporation of the economic logic of (vigilant) institutions of knowledge. For example, a historian becomes a mystagogue when he renounces historiographical thinking completely and begins accumulating empirical facts as a direct correlate of the value that the university (institution) places on the accumulation of registered data in a scientific article. In this context, a theoretical intervention capable of widening the field of historiographical experience counts for very little. In turn, the literary critic has adopted mystagogical practices when he employs philology as the absolute knowledge regarding his field and discredits other routes to the literary in complicity with the State, as philology has historically been an essential resource in the formation of the canon and the hypostatization of official languages.

The mystagogues defend, even if it doesn't seem so, a type of heliopolitics: a political principle which illuminates all the rest of experience and which empowers him to subalternize, educate or free from the conditions of everyday oppressions. Because of this, the mystagogues understand that politics is a conflict regulated by consensus and that domination is violence without consent, because he follows an archetypal and hegemonic methodology. The mystagogue discards the possibility of the unconditioned and denies the existence of tones because he defends, with his own peculiar and elevated tone, the importance of hierarchies without scale, nobility without people, objectivity without solidarity, neutrality without the neutral, clarity without opacity or obscurity without false conscience, the secret without democracy or democracy without risk, the decomposition of the king's two bodies without the openness of the plebeian body. To explain the mystagogic

procedure, and since infrapolitics begins with a deep suspicion regarding the high tone of the new mystagogues, it is necessary to begin with a specific case. Here, that of a German critic who initially gave a warm welcome to deconstruction and, subsequently, took hold as a detractor, due to the anti-theory bias of his latest interventions: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht.

Gumbrecht denounces the alleged “textualist” excesses of deconstruction because he considers them a paradigmatic strategy of the linguistic turn and, therefore, a critical strategy that reduces the real to its textual manifestation. In order to avoid the negative traps of deconstructive practice, Gumbrecht proposes a literary ontology based on the paradigm of subjectivity, which consists in equipping the category of *Stimmung* with a philosophical status beyond its Heideggerian version. For Heidegger, the *Stimmungen* is an ontic disposition of Dasein because it is an everyday affective exposition (*Befindlichkeit*). On the contrary, for Gumbrecht the quest for the *Stimmung* of a text enables feeling the literary work, or any work in general, in its ontological singularity. This suggests that critique, either historical or literary, must read the texts of each discipline looking for the *Stimmung* or the tonalities of each work without necessarily commenting upon the text. In this way, *critique* abandons the paradigm of representation and significance in order to locate itself in a space that transcends the linguistic-textual sphere: the production of presence and the recovery of the physical dimension of objects (cf. Gumbrecht *The Production*). Accordingly, the literary ontology proposed by Gumbrecht is an anti-hermeneutical modality, which contrasts with the “textualist” version he associates with deconstruction. For this philologist, deconstruction failed because it did not solve the problem of the link between the text as a semantic-material product and the extra-linguistic reality independent of it. The evidence of this epistemological misreading is represented in the deconstructive motto “There is nothing outside the text;” for Gumbrecht, this epistemic imperative is proof that, despite its innovative efforts, deconstruction is part of the tradition of the *linguistic turn* (cf. Gumbrecht *Atmosphere*).

Within the framework of the decline of hermeneutics and the recovery of speculative realism, Gumbrecht claims that his *Stimmungen* theory is a *third stance* which enables the resolution of the aporias of deconstructive textualism and the identitarian limits of *Cultural Studies*. Instead of focusing the critical operation on the allegories of the text, or on its evocative capacity, the *Stimmungen* describe emotional states not as debris of the reader's subjectivity but as a measurement of physical phenomena capable of producing a *presence*.

Gumbrecht opts for the German word *Stimmungen* because, in contrast with *mood* or *atmosphere*, this term emphasizes the tonal dimension of the emotional states that appear during the reading of the text. The German word *Stimme* understood as “voice” and the verb *stimmen* explained as “tuning” points directly towards a musical connotation: “tuning an instrument.” Therefore, tracing the *Stimmungen* of historical and literary texts supposes the discovery of the voice and the tone in which they are composed, for they commonly employ musical or climatological references to express the underlying emotional states. Gumbrecht’s claim is that the focus “on atmospheres and moods offers literary studies a possibility for reclaiming vitality and aesthetic immediacy that have, for the most part, gone missing (*Atmosphere* 12).

However, even though literary ontology could be understood as a complement to deconstruction, Gumbrecht announced his proposal after rejecting this type of analysis. Gumbrecht claims that deconstruction has been constantly defensive and, for that very reason, maintains a tone that was not foreseen by its apologists: a tone of *ascetic self-pity*. What does it mean to assume an ascetic tone in deconstruction? What political configuration is at stake with this curious *ad hominem* argumentation? If deconstruction maintains a subjective component activated by melancholy for the referent, why is Derrida understood as the visionary who renewed the field of literary studies, humanities and philosophy?

Gumbrecht holds that deconstruction cultivated an ascetic tone, sustained by a state of permanent mourning, due to the fact that it is the affective heir of postwar existentialism: “the pathetic mood of refusal transformed into melancholy at the loss of reference ...” (*Atmosphere* 130). The *affective indeterminacy* (*fablen Ungestimmtheit*) of deconstruction, materialized in an ascetic tone when it became detached of all possible materiality. Deconstruction was oriented by a postmetaphysical pretension in which language lost all reference, external world, and body, becoming pure linguistic instability. The melancholic pathos, which acquires its ultimate deconstructive gesture in the concern regarding its traces and its promise, did not manage to form a serious critical project due to its “programmatic frugality” and its unavoidable nostalgia for meaning, *différance* and the *supplement*: “Like the heroes of Existentialist literature, Deconstructionists congratulated each other for the ascetic rigor with which they carried out their mission” (*Atmosphere* 131). Are the ascetic tone and the alleged loss of materiality the result of deconstructive practice or of its unwanted affective consequences?

Gumbrecht explains that the ascetic tone of deconstruction stems directly from the prophetic figure of Derrida and, especially, from the adoration of his more radical American advocates: “Derrida’s most ardent enthusiasts wanted to view him as a prophet, pure and simple. Photos that are still in circulation show a youthful philosopher with ascetic traits, his eyes gazing into the distance, as if he were a visionary” (*Atmosphere* 131). Gumbrecht is probably confusing Derrida's oeuvre with the American history of deconstruction. Contrary to what one could imagine, rather than elaborating a caricature, he has built a “straw man” to justify the emergence of the distinguished tone in literary studies. What is relevant is that Gumbrecht accused Derrida of adopting the tone of a great lord and did not notice an oversight grounded in his own distinguished tone: the accusation of ascetic pathos does not belong to the gesture but to the signature, to Derrida's first name, to the domestication of a corpus, to the national history of a form of thought. For this reason, Gumbrecht maintains the existence of a strong correlation between the ascetic tone and the figure of the expressive visionary, since deconstructive practice is in greater need of expression and feeling rather than of rationality and critique: “Certainly not in literature, where—under the cover of fiction—precisely this kind of metamorphosis has contributed to the charm and charisma of the heroes of Existentialism. In the academic world, however, other rules are supposed to prevail, which are intended to prevent sentiments and moods from trumping arguments” (*Atmosphere* 132). With this claim, Gumbrecht exposes the distinguished tone which characterizes him as a “policeman of science” even though, paradoxically, his proposal is even more radically grounded in intuition and pathos.

Finally, the institution of mystagogy is complete with the proclamation of the death of deconstruction. In an apocalyptic tone, Gumbrecht declares that the ascetic attitude and the melancholic gesture, strengthened by the accusation of anti-Semitism against Paul de Man, is the blow of the trumpets of the end of Derrida's distinguished image. “The pathos of ascetic self-pity seemed to have turned into a self-indulgent license for logically—and morally—arbitrary judgments. Deconstruction had played the first bars of its own funeral march” (*Atmosphere* 134). With this claim, Gumbrecht concludes his book and reveals that the rules of rationality demanded of deconstruction are not to be followed and acknowledged by its own critique since, as it is pronounced in the tone of a great lord, it is exempt from the democratic demands of public reason.

Nonetheless, the denunciation of asceticism in deconstructive practice must be related

to a *politics of critique* elliptically sustained by Gumbrecht: he behaves like a new mystagogue when he adopts an apocalyptic tone in the presentation of his program. Here is the first irony. Gumbrecht rejects deconstruction because of its ascetic tone with an *ad hominem* argumentation. This text recognizes, ironically, that Gumbrecht keeps a distinguished tone, a tone of a great lord, an apocalyptic tone regarding critique and deconstruction and, in order to do so, the essay deploys an *ad hominem* argumentation. Second irony: writing an argument against the new mystagogues risks incurring in a distinguished tone. Even so, in order to highlight the current relevance of the infrapolitical tone—since infrapolitics gets rid of the burden of having to prove the politicity of the critique—it is necessary to illustrate the mystagogical operation performed by Gumbrecht in his anti-theoretical proposal and not just in his rejection of deconstruction.

In the first place, just as the Kantian mystagogue, Gumbrecht grants a predominant value to intuition over concepts. The work of method, the commentary of the text and the patience of reading are captured by the *tone of a great lord*, through which, in the name of humanism, the critic can trust in his *hunch*, in his *high feeling* and in the *Stimmungen* which allows him to access the core of the text: “Indeed, my skepticism concerning methods is even stronger, for I believe that researchers on the terrain of the ‘human sciences’ should rely more on the potential of counterintuitive thinking than on a pre-established ‘path’ or ‘way’ (the etymological meaning of method). Counterintuitive thinking is not afraid to deviate from the norms of rationality and logic that govern everyday life (and for good reason!). Instead, it is set into motion by ‘hunches’” (*Atmosphere* 17).

Secondly, Gumbrecht, who accused Derrida and deconstructionists of living in a state of mourning caused by the melancholy of the referent, ironically turns to an emotional state based on the melancholy of presence. This aristocratic attitude adopts a *distinguished tone* because only a few chosen ones are capable of apprehending the *Stimmungen* of the historical and literary texts: “The yearning for Stimmung has grown, because many of us—perhaps older people, above all—suffer from existence in an everyday world that often fails to surround and envelop us physically. Yearning for atmosphere and mood is a yearning for presence—perhaps a variant that presupposes a pleasure in dealing with the cultural past” (*Atmosphere* 20). Finally, Gumbrecht adopts an *apocalyptic tone* for literary science and reveals that its vitality will depend upon the rejection of the *alegoresis* of deconstruction, since it is not capable of accessing the linguistic referent in the world, and the avoidance of the

“epistemological negligence” of cultural studies, which are incapable of obtaining a renowned theoretical result. If deconstruction's desertion of the world and the rejection of theory that stems from the prevalence of cultural studies in university departments, the end of literary science is near. “I believe that literary studies, as a site where intellectual forces combine, risks stagnation for as long as it remains stuck between these two positions, whose contrasts and tensions can cancel each other out. To overcome such dangers—which have already materialized in part—we need ‘third positions’” (*Atmosphere* 3).

The relevant point is that Gumbrecht's argumentation relies on a concealed anti-theoretical feeling, a feeling that becomes resentment, inasmuch as the accusation of irrationalism made against deconstruction is activated by way of a rejection of the critical possibilities of reason. Therefore, I claim that the first thing which infrapolitical deconstruction upholds, against the new mystagogues, is the importance of theory and, by extension, of a *radical Enlightenment* as the epigone of the *democracy to come*. Infrapolitics does not admit the tone of a great lord or an apocalyptic tone. It rejects not only the antidemocratic bias which is found in these versions of well-meaning humanism, but also the critical operation underlying its unconditional rationalism, an unconditional critique of all conditionalities—particularly the political conditionalities of unconditional politics, of a politics without exceptions.

Following the trail of an enlightened marranism, infrapolitics does not abandon critique, on the contrary, it radicalizes it by establishing a critique of critique, but with the caveat that this Enlightenment does not suppose the consummation of an historical era. Rather, it recognizes the impossible horizon of a time without depletion, of an Enlightenment which is necessarily an *Enlightenment to come*. This unconditional critique of conditionalities acquires an infrapolitical tone precisely because it is interested in politics, but in *politics in retreat*, in politics that condition experience without reducing it. Infrapolitics, therefore, does not advocate for the elimination or the totalization of the modern characteristics of Western politics, because it considers it impossible to avoid the political horizon of modernity; rather, infrapolitics re-frames the correlation between thought and politics in order to do politics in a minor tone.

Just as Kafka's is a minor literature, as explained by Deleuze and Guattari, so is infrapolitics a minor politics, an *infra*, a low or minor tone which produces a de-conceptualization of experience instead of a de-territorialization of language. Thought and

politics are *discharged* from the totalizing form to which philosophy and politics have aspired as the pure form of modernity: Neither total politics nor totalizing thought, since experience—fragmentary and necessarily contingent—cannot be captured by those forms. Therefore, the tone of infrapolitics cannot be apocalyptic, since it does not proclaim the end of philosophy, or the end of history, or the end of critique—it just describes the present situation. But it does not indulge in a distinguished tone either, because fragmentary experience prevents the appropriation of forms of life since it rejects the heliopolitical imperative of modernity: *you will not obey for you will not reign*.

The relationship between infrapolitics and theory is inevitable. Infrapolitics thinks the concurrence between politics and thought, but also differentiates the field of each sphere, while recognizing the impossibility of getting out of this relationship. Infrapolitics is more a policy of thought than a kind of political thinking. Against the zero degree of theory, infrapolitics politicizes theoretical practices, deconstructs the political momentum behind discursive enunciations and, simultaneously, theorizes about the ontological impact of political thought. This is not to suggest that an infrapolitical practice is exclusively a negative practice, initially or essentially nihilistic. Infrapolitics suspects that behind every emancipatory program there is the possibility of a new form of dominance. But infrapolitics also retrieves the possibility of a policy of non-domination in which the sacrificial logic of modern politics is removed from the horizon of thought politics. To halt or promote the *pathos* of modern politics, infrapolitics retrieves the normative force of thought, not in the form in which modern political philosophy has understood the relationship between legislation and reality, but as a mode of infinite normativity, as a sort of unconditional rationalism.

In consequence, theory adopts an infrapolitical tone the moment it assumes an unconditional rationalism as the necessary complement to the democracy to come. In contrast with the heliopolitical principle which originated with Aristotle and was confirmed by Machiavelli (“if one obeys it is in the condition of reigning”), up to the communitarian formulation of neo-Zapatism (“the one who reigns, reigns by obeying”), infrapolitics may opt for passive action since it has been (de)institutionalized as a poshegemonic operation. In this way, infrapolitics supposes a minor tone because it dismisses becoming a political program or a philosophy, since it is more like a gaze, a new orientation of thought and experience regarding the impact of politics in life. Restraining this impact, suspending it, not

allowing it to saturate our vital space is one of its minor but important tasks. Infrapolitics reconciles politics with its shadows since it disengages them as two autonomous but dependent spheres.

Infrapolitics seeks to radicalize deconstruction: deconstructing reconstruction of the world of life processes. This suggests that the experience of reality is amendable, since what is out of subjectivity cannot be corrected through a conceptual schema. The infrapolitical is thus the experience of the impossibility of total conceptualization of experience. Therefore, infrapolitics is a form of negative realism, a type of realism that, along with a work about the negative, employs the negativity as an instrument for a minimalist ontology. Infrapolitics reverses the Spinozian principle *omnis determinatio est negatio* and transforms it by an *omnis determinatio est negation*. As a result, infrapolitical realism inhabits a negative measure that prevents the onto-theological from talking hold of the various regimes of representation, identity and the totalizing power of communitarian politics. The infrapolitical project is a realist one, because it does not count on a transcendental subject, a textualist idealism, a neo-communism or a hermeneutic beyond of actuality; it is infrapolitical because it recognizes that life in its radical immanence is the only non-conceptual, un-representable and aporetic form of experience. Finally, as an academic artifact, infrapolitics, in its genealogy and archive, should be measured as a medium and long-term project. In today's Posthegemonic times, infrapolitical reflection becomes necessary, but, at the same time, neither the theory nor its public discussion can get ahead of the radical contingency of thought. To date, we can only say that there is a newly arisen infrapolitical tone in theory.

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Notes

¹ The writing of this paper has multiple debts. First, thanks to Gonzalo Bustamante Moya and, in particular, to Jaime Rodríguez Matos, for help in the stylistic elaboration of the text. In addition, this text would be impossible without the discussions held by the group "The Infrapolitical Deconstruction Collective", those who know balancing the courage of intelligence with the force of friendship.