An-*archē*-ism in *Caballos salvajes*

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Abstract

Marcelo Piñeyro's 1995 film *Caballos salvajes* chronicles the five-day journey of two fugitives, José and Pedro, from Argentina's capital city of Buenos Aires to the nation's southern region after a holdup gone awry. Thanks to intense media interest, the runaways become national heroes, understood as modern-day Robin Hood figures after giving the stolen money away to a community of recently laid off chemical plant workers.

In this paper, I argue that what is at stake for José throughout the film is what Alberto Moreiras has termed "infrapolitics." Moreiras has described infrapolitics as "la diferencia absoluta entre vida y política," arguing for a theoretical stance which acknowledges that politics does not (indeed, *cannot*) exhaust life itself. I argue that the film offers us the notion that, while politics does mark many aspects of life, there remains a level of experience that cannot be subsumed under any sort of calculative political logic. *Caballos salvajes* therefore posits

a version of José's anarchist politics that is an-*archē*-ic, an anarchism that sidesteps anarchism's paradoxical principal of non-foundation.

Keywords: Anarchism, infrapolitics, heist, road movie

Resumen

La película de Marcelo Piñeyro de 1995, *Caballos salvajes*, narra el viaje de cinco días de dos fugitivos, José y Pedro, desde Buenos Aires, la capital de Argentina, hasta la región sur del país después de un atraco que salió mal. Gracias al intenso interés de los medios, los fugitivos se convierten en héroes nacionales, entendidos como figuras modernas de Robin Hood después de regalar el dinero robado a una comunidad de trabajadores de plantas químicas recientemente despedidos.

En este trabajo, sostengo que lo que está en juego para José a lo largo de la película es lo que Alberto Moreiras ha denominado "infrapolítica". Moreiras ha descrito la infrapolítica como "la diferencia absoluta entre vida y política", defendiendo una postura teórica que reconoce que la política no agota (de hecho, no *puede* agotar) la vida misma. Sostengo que la película nos ofrece la noción de que, si bien la política marca muchos aspectos de la vida, sigue existiendo un nivel de experiencia que no puede subsumirse bajo ningún tipo de lógica política calculadora. Por lo tanto, *Caballos salvajes* plantea una versión de la política anarquista de José que es an-*archē*-ic, un anarquismo que elude el paradójico principio de falta de fundamento del anarquismo.

Palabras claves: Anarquismo, infrapolítica, robo, película de carretera

I will start by appropriating for this paper a notion from Gareth Williams' book, *Infrapolitical Passages: Global Turmoil, Narco-Accumulation, and the Post-Sovereign State*. In his introduction, Williams offers two seemingly contradictory gestures that will characterize the rest of the book: one, grandiose, and the other, modest. With the term "infrapolitics," Williams

refers not to a different politics taken from any mainstream vocabularies, and neither to the term in the somewhat more well-known sense that James Scott has used it. In *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, for example, Scott defines infrapolitics as an activity that is "practiced outside the visible spectrum of what usually passes for political activity..." (xx) and, for him, these are actions like foot-dragging on the factory floor or absenteeism, actions that are not generally viewed as political acts but that do enter the political sphere if they are taken in an effort to alter a power imbalance. While for Williams infrapolitics might share something with Scott's definition, he goes a step further. In Williams' definition, infrapolitics is the deconstruction of seemingly all of the political concepts we have in our modern tool belt, including the subject, sovereignty, and other such terms that pepper the pages of political theory books. This is largely in line with how Alberto Moreiras has described infrapolitics, calling it in his book *Infrapolítica: Instrucciones de uso* "el segundo momento de la deconstrucción" (15). So, while on the one hand *Infrapolitical Passages* aims to deconstruct *everything*, it is also a book that claims, explicitly, to make no progress: "this is a book that makes no progress, and intentionally so" (29). For both Williams and Moreiras, infrapolitics' proposed deconstruction of the concepts of modern political thought remits to nothing, to no political program or way forward, offering "no preceding political or ethical light to mark the path" (Moreiras, "Infrapolitical Derrida" 122). This is not entirely different from the political implications of deconstruction in the Derridean sense, which, of course, has generated criticism for its supposed lack of jumping off point for any politics of real transformation. For Williams, then, what is at stake with infrapolitics might be simultaneously "absolutely or virtually nothing" or "absolutely everything" (32).

I adopt Williams' more modest claim, that in the present paper, there may be virtually nothing at stake, but that this *nothing* is generative to the extent that it sidesteps a paradox which is at the heart of the political project which

underlies the film under consideration here: anarchism in Marcelo Piñeyro's 1995 film *Caballos salvajes*.

An-*archē*-ism

Before giving an overview of the film and entering into discussion of it, let me first lay out what I mean when I refer to the paradox of anarchism. Whereas much academic writing on anarchism is content to take anarchism at its word (that the term simply means opposition to the state, in the sense of opposition to its institutions of governance like legislatures, the police, etc.), I suggest that in reality what is at stake can be captured by what the Greeks meant with the term *archē*—a dual foundation and command—of which the modern state is just the most obvious example. The philosophical record of the Greek term *archē* goes back to at least Homer, Herodotus, and Pindar (roughly to lead, to command, and to dominate, respectively), but as Reiner Schürmann notes, with Aristotle the term takes on a combined meaning: "the Aristotelian innovation consists in uniting the two senses, inception and domination, in the same abstract concept" (97). We can pursue this line of thinking rather than restricting ourselves solely to a consideration of tangible state structures because, across the range of manifestations of anarchist thought and practice in Latin America and throughout the world, what is ultimately at stake is a stated rejection of any foundational thought or commanding practice. Indeed, while it is true that this anarchist gesture of rejection is most obviously recognizable in view of what is commonly understood as the state and its associated structures of governance, it takes other separate but related forms as well. It takes aim at, for example, what Louis Althusser has called ideological state apparatuses, in particular two other terms—the church and capitalism—that, alongside the state, make up the principal enemies of anarchism, forming a sort of tripartite coalition. But the rejection extends in other directions as well. Anarchists have rejected

cultural conventions like the nuclear family, heteronormative sexualities and gender identities, racial and ethnic hierarchies, the list goes on and on. As Jesse Cohn notes in his book *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture 1848-2011*, "To be an anarchist, in a place and time like any part of the world in the twentieth century, is to deny the legitimacy of almost every feature of that world: its nation-states, its religions, its pretense of representational government, its organization of production and consumption, its patriarchal customs, its warped ideals—*etc., etc*.: there is almost no end to the things one is 'against'" (8). The common thread through all of these modes of anarchism can be encapsulated in the Greek term *archē*, whether it takes a macro or micro form. If we were to come up with a short and rather pithy phrase that gives voice to one of the fundamental gestures of anarchism, it might be best summed up as a terse "don't tell me what to do," directed at authoritative conventions both large and small.

One question that emerges, then, is this: to what extent can anarchism live up to its own professed goals? Or to put it another way, can anarchism really be an-*archē*-ic (without *archē*)? I suggest that it cannot. In its attempt to inaugurate a mode of politics that is not based on authoritative conventions and coercion, were it to be successful anarchism would ultimately bring forth a paradoxical principle of non-foundation. In other words, anarchism substitutes one *archē* for another. The anarchy that Reiner Schürmann (referenced above) is interested in is different from my primary interest here, but his observations are worth highlighting given that my argument about political anarchism is largely in agreement with an assertion that he makes in the introduction to *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*. In the section "Deconstructing Action," Schürmann warns the reader that "here it will not be a question of anarchy in the sense of Proudhon, Bakunin, and their disciples." He writes this to guard against the potential establishment of a direct equivalence between his analysis of Heidegger and political anarchism

precisely because "what [Proudhon, Bakunin, and their disciples] sought was to *displace* the origin, to substitute the 'rational' power, *principium*, for the power of authority, *princeps*—as metaphysical an operation as has ever been" (6). On this point, I am in agreement with Schürmann.

But the point here is not that the paradox I am signaling sounds the death-knell for anarchism; it does not. Anarchism is still a mode of politics with material consequences, even if one accepts this argument. A recent book-length study on this very question is Spanish philosopher and militant Tomás Ibáñez's, *Anarquismo no fundacional: Afrontando la dominación en el siglo XXI*. Ibáñez asserts that "El problema es que el anarquismo político solo contempló una de las dos caras de esa entidad bifronte que es el *arkhé*, se centró en la cara que representaba el poder —el *kratos*— ignorando la otra cara representada por el principio fundacional" (54). Ibáñez advocates for what he calls non-foundational anarchism that would continually problematize and combat the specter of a solid and dogmatic foundation or *archē*. Ibáñez takes inspiration from historical episodes such as May 1968 and Seattle 1999 that, although they were not explicitly anarchist episodes, "se trata de episodios de lucha que despliegan, inventan y hacen emerger ideas de carácter libertario a partir de prácticas que no surgen directamente de un ideario preexistente (*archē*)" (60). In short, Ibáñez's "anarquismo no fundacional" would be conceived not as an attempt to carry out a revolution but rather "[impulsar] una ética de la revuelta" (62), an ethics that rejects both the *archē* and the *telos*, the beginning that commands as well as the end that orients. What I mean to point out, then, is simply that there is a conceptual price to pay for what we might call orthodox anarchism in the course of pursuing the type of world it wants to bring into being. In its search for a mode of political life that is without *archē*, anarchism becomes one unless it actively refuses the dual trap of archē and telos.

With this in mind, then, I now turn to Marcelo Piñeyro's film, *Caballos*

salvajes. This film chronicles the five-day journey of two fugitives, José and Pedro, from Argentina's capital city of Buenos Aires to the nation's southern region after a holdup at a financial firm that goes awry. The impetus for the holdup is José's desire to recuperate precisely $15,344 that the bank stole from him and his family many years ago. Fleeing from the capital city, the two runaways—Pedro, the young employee originally held up by José, an aging anarchist—develop an unlikely friendship. Thanks to intense media interest, José and Pedro become national heroes, understood as modern-day Robin Hood figures after giving nearly all the stolen money away to a community of recently laid off chemical plant workers. As they flee from town to town, local citizens develop a support network, offering food and other help so that José, Pedro, and Ana—a young woman who joins the duo about halfway through the film after attempting to rob them—can reach safety. The film ends with Pedro and Ana riding horseback across the border to Chile, while José releases the remaining horses. As the horses ride off into the distance, José celebrates a new sense of freedom before being shot from behind by an anonymous killer.

The existing literature on this film has tended to focus on one of two different aspects: the aesthetic characteristics that it shares with classic Westerns emanating from the United States, or the category of crime, as such, and the different ways in which crime as a category can be resignified in order to cast judgment on one or another social actor. Carolina Rocha, for example, in "Riding Against the Wave? *Caballos salvajes* and Its Critique of Neoliberal Culture" argues that "*Caballos salvajes* uses some elements of the American Western to provide a critical examination of Argentina's immersion into a market economy and the neoliberal culture of the decade" (167-168), referring specifically to the film's production during Carlos Menem's presidency which is widely regarded as Argentina's first serious embrace of neoliberal capitalism. Among other factors, Rocha identifies the film with the Western motif of expansion given that the protagonists flee from the city to the country,

making use of the *civilización|barbarie* binary that has governed the Argentine cultural and political imaginary since the time of Sarmiento. Rocha's reading shares much in common with Susana Sandmann who, in "Cartographies of Identity in *Caballos salvajes*," identifies a pattern in Argentine film of the 1990s in that, working against the deterritorializing effects of neoliberal capital, a number of the most noteworthy films of the decade "attempt to anchor national identity in the national territory" (185-186). Sandmann highlights the film's development of place through wide shots of Patagonia as the José and Pedro travel away from the city (190), the juxtaposition of such images with the values of solidarity, and generosity characteristic of the "common folks of the interior" (192), even going so far as to compare José with the archetypal figure of the Argentine *gaucho*, a figure whose "goodness and decency, as well as the resistant spirit against the injustices created by the politics of Buenos Aires, are part of the land..." (195).

Rocha and Sandmann are correct to emphasize the movement through the national territory and how the film instrumentalizes this movement to construct a sense of place. This construction, in turn, is noteworthy not only for the internal logics of the film itself, but also for how it fits into larger trends in Argentine cinema of the 1990s. As Sandmann correctly points out, *Caballos salvajes* is one of a number of films produced during the final decade of the 20th century in Argentina that foregrounds the nation. In this way, the nation can rightfully be emphasized as a category of analysis, in spite of trends in much of the criticism towards a consideration more attuned to the transnational. In her 2005 article "The Nation as the *mise-en-scène* of Film-Making in Argentina," Joanna Page shows that "calls to write off the nation as a framework for film analysis are premature," while noting that a renewed emphasis on the nation can still allow for "an analysis which remains sensitive to the nation as a porous entity...the nation as unfinished project, hybrid, transculturated, marginalized and positioned as dependent within the

asymmetrical structures of globalization" (311).

Page has also emphasized crime as an object of inquiry in *Caballos salvajes*. In her book *Crisis and Capitalism in Contemporary Argentine Cinema*, she writes that "*Caballos salvajes* presents the paradigmatic narrative of the 'just crime'" (83) since the viewer is led to sympathize with José in his quest to exact revenge on *el sistema* that harmed him so many years ago. Page compares *Caballos salvajes* favorably to the much more commercially successful *Nueve reinas* directed by Fabián Bielinsky, a heist film that, in spite of "[having] been praised by critics and audiences alike for achieving a genuine synthesis between artistic merit and commercial viability" (86), in her view, gives way to a rather conservative reading. Reflecting on the film's version of meritocracy ("the most intelligent wins"), Page argues that "ultimately, *Nueve reinas* leaves the logic of capitalism untouched. Its organization obeys the structure of the capitalist dream, in which the worker of today is the millionaire of tomorrow" (93).

The comparison to *Nueves reinas* is suggestive and worth ruminating on for a moment. As many commentators have noted, *Nueve reinas* follows what have become the more-or-less standard conventions of the heist film genre, and while *Caballos salvajes* does foreground the holdup of a financial institution like so many heist films, it also departs from the genre conventions in some noteworthy ways. Perhaps the most obvious difference would be that the heist that serves as the catalyst for the events of *Caballos salvajes* occurs within the first five minutes of the film. As the opening credits roll, the first shot we see is a black and white, slow-motion view of a Buenos Aires sidewalk, with José walking against the flow of the primarily faceless pedestrians. As he nears the camera, the shot slowly changes to color as the voiceover narration sets a somber tone for the film. In the final lines of his opening soliloquy, José foreshadows the end of the film: "...un día descubrí que todavía podía hacer algo para estar completamente vivo, antes de estar definitivamente muerto.

Entonces, me puse en movimiento" (00:02:24–00:02:39).

Immediately after this opening sequence, the holdup occurs. José calmly passes by the news reporter who would later come to play a role in the mediatization of the event and subsequent chase, enters the financial institution, and makes his demand. The events unfold quickly and both José and Pedro flee the building within the film's first five minutes. The brevity of the heist event in *Caballos salvajes* is thus in stark contrast with how holdups tend to be portrayed in more conventional heist films. In *Nueve reinas*, or nearly any major heist movie, a main narrative motor is not the holdup itself, but rather the careful planning and methodical buildup to the heist. Viewers come to like and identify with the characters as they accompany them on the journey towards a difficult or seemingly impossible undertaking. The narrative hitches and unexpected surprises along the way serve to heighten our sense of doubt as to whether or not they really will be able to pull it off. In films like *Nueves reinas*, then, the careful collaboration between the motley crew of characters and detailed choreography necessary for the operation to have a chance at success constitutes the heist itself as a work of art. As Daryl Lee has noted, in standard heist films the heist "celebrates a collective *aesthetic* act—even in the grittiest heists, the thieves steal with style" (21). This is decidedly not the case in *Caballos salvajes*. What we see in this film is rather a story of the unplanned aftermath of a small-scale heist that occurs rather haphazardly in the opening minutes of a 2-hour long movie. As viewers, we do not get to accompany José as he draws up plans for the big (or not so big) moment; on the contrary, we are offered only a few brief lines of a monologue before the scene takes off, and virtually no development of the character (Pedro) who will become José's main partner in crime.

But while the central narrative motor for *Caballos salvajes* departs from this most obvious convention of standard heist films, it does share a number of other qualities with the heist genre. The cast of characters generally pulled

together for the big heist are likable misfits—folks who, for one reason or another, find themselves outside of the mainstream. Among those assembled for the task, typically there emerge one or more mentor/mentee relationships in which an older and more seasoned criminal takes a younger colleague under their wing in order to show them tricks of the trade or perhaps open their eyes to some new social reality. Heist films generally give us bits and pieces of backstory of these various characters, often highlighting some sort of economic injustice or hardship that appears to serve as a main impetus for the decision to join the heist, sometimes reluctantly. Relatedly, a common underlying theme in heist films is a critique of the dominant socio-economic order, since viewers are led to root for the criminals in their attempt to exact revenge on a system that has caused them personal loss. On these points, *Caballos salvajes* falls squarely within the conventions of a standard heist film.

The most important shared characteristic between a standard heist film like *Nueve reinas* and a less conventional example like *Caballos salvajes*, however, has to do with a point that becomes obvious to viewers at a decisive moment in virtually every heist film: that it is not *really* about the money. Here, two things can simultaneously be true. The big bank heist is, of course, at least *partially* about the money—the characters in heist films may need material wealth in order to repay a debt, cover a medical procedure, reclaim something valuable to their family, or any number of reasons—but fans of heist films know that *something else* tends to eclipse monetary gain as the primary motive for the crime. In *Nueve reinas*, this becomes obvious little by little with the family dynamics between Marcos and Valeria, then punctuated in the final twist when the con is revealed and viewers learn of Juan and Valeria's romantic relationship. Indeed, we could enumerate a lengthy list of heist productions in which the money ends up taking a back seat to some other factor. The best example of this may be Steven Soderbergh's remake of the 1960 film *Ocean's Eleven*. In this film, despite the massive sums of money at stake, it is revealed

that, for Danny Ocean, the whole thing is, in fact, about his ex-wife Tess.

On this point, *Caballos salvajes* is no exception. What is certainly true about this film is that, yes, money itself is a central theme, perhaps another version of what Ricardo Piglia has asserted about money when discussing the literature of Roberto Arlt in his book *Crítica y ficción*: "el dinero otorga un poder infinito y es la única ley y la única verdad en una sociedad que es una jungla" (26). But while the money, as such, does play an important role in the film, what is really at stake is something else: something *infrapolitical*.

"No estoy hablando de política"

The infrapolitical theme is present at various points throughout the film, but I'll first focus on one key moment early in the story to illustrate my point. There are two important things to note about this early scene. On the one hand, José voices, explicitly, the contradiction at the heart of anarchist politics I mentioned earlier (and to which Catherine Malabou has recently dedicated an entire book-length study). On the other hand, here José voices, also explicitly, the film's first gesture towards infrapolitics as described by Moreiras, Williams, and others. The scene unfolds like this. Shortly after leaving the city, José and Pedro get into an argument about what is ultimately at stake in the episode that has brought them together. Pedro comes to realize that José's motives exceed the simple desire for money. José had demanded the precise amount of the original deposit from many years ago, not a penny more or less—indeed, it is later noted by the firm's employees that he even refused to calculate any interest, a decision that might have led him to demand a far greater sum. José explains that his desire to rectify this past injustice is informed by his view of the interconnectedness of a series of bad actors: the bankers, politicians, narcotraffickers, and more. In a word, he views his attempted holdup as a blow against *el sistema*.

I will isolate the two moments I want to comment from this scene and

discuss them out of order, starting with the phrase uttered by José that closes the scene, a phrase that causes Pedro to cry out in despair ("¡Dios mío!"), re-start the car, and angrily speed off. When Pedro realizes that, for José, it is not only about the money, he becomes exasperated and resignedly accepts what he thinks is the situation: "Entiendo. Usted es marxista." José corrects him: "Soy mucho más antiguo que esto... Soy anarquista" (00:17:54–00:18:15).

It is not the distance separating Marxism from anarchism that I want to highlight here. Much ink has been spilled on that topic and, at the moment, I have nothing to add to those discussions. Rather, I want to isolate the phrase "soy anarquista" and reflect on the paradox I referred to earlier. The uttering of the phrase "soy anarquista" gives voice to the paradox of anarchism, acting as performative speech in the way JL Austin elaborated in the series of lectures compiled under the title *How to Do Things with Words*. How this paradox is made manifest, specifically as it relates to the conceptual history of anarchism, has been elaborated by French philosopher Catherine Malabou in her recent book *Stop Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy*. I have written a slightly more in-depth reflection on this book elsewhere[1] and will therefore not rehash the entire text, but Malabou's discussion of the phrase "I am an anarchist" is relevant here. In *Stop Thief!*, Malabou is interested in the question of why some of the most well-known European philosophers of the 20th century (Reiner Schürmann, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Rancière) all developed their own flavors of philosophical an-*archē*-ism but, in each case, precisely one which did not lead to an avowed association with political anarchism. Of the thinkers she surveys, the exact character of the disavowal ranges from the somewhat implicit to the direct and explicit. For example, in the book's fourth chapter, "Ontological Anarchy: Traveling from Greece to the Andes with Reiner Schürmann," Malabou outlines Schürmann's consideration of the question of an-*archē*-ic possibility and notes the explicit rejection of an association with political anarchism I referred to above ("here it

will not be a question of anarchy in the sense of Proudhon, Bakunin, and their disciples"), but Malabou almost seems not to believe Schürmann. In a playful end to the chapter, Malabou references Schürmann's chapter "Acting, the Condition for Thinking" from *Heidegger on Being and Acting*...where he writes "To understand poverty one must be poor. To understand detachment one must be detached. In Heidegger, to understand the turn, one must oneself turn about..." (236). Malabou concludes her chapter writing, then, that "to understand anarchy, one must surely be ..." (60). But while the question of whether or not Schürmann really was a political anarchist is interesting in its own right, what is most immediately relevant is how he would have described the relationship between philosophical anarchy and political anarchism. For Schürmann, political anarchism would be the ontic version of the ontological anarchy his book so compellingly theorizes. To say "soy anarquista" then, as José does when prompted by Pedro to declare his politics, is the linguistic enactment of the paradox that Schürmann wants to avoid by demarcating anarchy from anarchism.

So, while on the one hand, the language that José employs in this scene reminds us of the foundational paradox of political anarchism, this key scene is also the first moment in the film where the question of infrapolitics comes fully into view. This entire episode is set off when Pedro incredulously seeks to know why José has turned the entire heist into a question of politics instead of the seemingly more immediate life-or-death crisis that confronts Pedro: "Usted me está hablando de política, ¡yo estoy hablando de que me quieren matar!" José resolutely refuses this accusation, stopping the conversation to exit the car they are traveling in, circle it brusquely, and re-enter, scolding his young travel companion: "¿Cómo voy a hablar de política? No estoy hablando de política. Hablo del mundo en el que estás viviendo" (00:16:47–00:17:29).

I highlight this moment because here José highlights precisely what has become the operative shorthand definition of infrapolitics for Alberto

Fig. 1. José scolding Pedro who remains in the car.

Moreiras: the distinction between life and politics. Moreiras, in chapter five of *Infrapolítica: Instrucciones de uso*, laments the fact that so many potentially interested interlocutors on the question of infrapolitics harass him for a definition or a concrete example: "me vuelven loco con la demanda de definición…como si me importara mayormente fijar un significado, cifrar una esencia; como si eso fuera, no ya lo más importante, sino condición *sine qua non* para tirar adelante, usar la palabra…" (105). While he obviously wants to resist the demand to *cifrar una esencia*, in response, Moreiras reluctantly offers the closest thing to a definition that he can stand to muster: "la diferencia absoluta entre vida y política" (105).

What is most important for José is not anarchism as it has been handed down from the intellectual legacies of political anarchism's founding fathers (French philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Russian revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin, and Russian geographer Peter Kropotkin), but rather something coming closer to an an-*archē*-ism that could actually remain faithful to what is ultimately at stake in the anarchist position. First of all, it is noteworthy that, although he openly and explicitly declares himself an anarchist when

Pedro questions him, at no point throughout the film does José even mention any of the founding fathers of anarchist thought—neither Kropotkin, Bakunin, or Proudhon, nor any of the most influential anarchists in the Argentinian context like Pietro Gori, Alberto Ghiraldo, Errico Malatesta, etc. Indeed, the only political text he explicitly refers to is the social realism play *The Lower Depths* by Russian author Maxim Gorki. But second of all, if we reflect again on anarchism's paradoxical principle of non-foundation, the version of anarchism embodied by José sidesteps this paradox. Different from this fundamentally paradoxical anarchism, the anarchism embraced by José *refuses* to set itself forth as any sort of new principle, residing wholly and entirely in the realm of a rejection of politics as such. Much like Moreiras with his insistence that there is indeed a sphere of human experience that evades capture by politics, in this film, José's only allegiance is to his attempt to recuperate life, a life that was stolen from him when the bank wielded its oversized influence to exert the power of money over him. The way that José is ultimately able to avoid the paradox is that his refusal is total—it is total both in the sense of refusing an *archē* as well as a *telos*. His refusal is an attempt to hold onto and guard the singular in the face of the appropriative drives of a new hegemon. In other words, what José shows us is the possibility of an existential remainder that cannot be subsumed by politics or any other sort of normative theticism.

There is at least one obvious problem with this, of course. At the end of the film, in the precise moment that José frees the horses he has purchased back using the money taken from the bank, he is shot from behind by an anonymous killer. The fact that the killer remains anonymous is important, since at no point during the film are the agents who pursue José and Pedro explicitly identified—we do not know if they are police officers, officers in the Argentine military, employees of the financial firm, perhaps private vigilantes hired off the books, some hybrid version of all of these, or something else entirely. That the film refuses to divulge this information heightens the

suggested interconnectedness of state/capital/violence/public/private/etc. that José calls *el sistema*, a recognition that, in the contemporary world, there is no easily identifiable and singular locus of absolute power. This is another instance of José's divergence of what could be called a standard anarchist account of power since anarchism has historically privileged the state as the site of repressive power. This is not to suggest that anarchists have been or are completely unaware of intersecting forms of oppression, but there is little doubt that anarchism has placed comparatively more emphasis on state structures. The fact that José dies at the hands of this anonymous killer therefore lends to the rather obvious conclusion that his refusal of politics operates entirely within a sacrificial logic, that in the absence of some sort of decisive and legible political act, there can be no serious resistance to *el sistema*.

This is precisely the line of critique advanced by Bruno Bosteels in his book *The Actuality of Communism*. Near the end of his chapter dedicated to contrasting Moreiras' infrapolitics and Roberto Esposito's impolitics, Bosteels charges that "theirs is a strange kind of passive decision, or a decision in favor of passivity and inaction" (128). This is not entirely different from the relatively common accusation against the related field of deconstruction, that no actual politics can emerge from it. By criticizing deconstruction for being nothing more than a mode of reading and thinking that asserts a radical undecidability, this line of reasoning advances the notion that deconstruction is rendered inert when it comes to the pressing matters of life in a collectivity, that it provides no jumping off point for any sort of politics that might constitute a break from the world as it *really* is. A response typically offered to what its detractors view as the "non-decision" tends to prefer the perceived gains to be made by hegemony theory in the vein of thinkers like Antonio Gramsci or Ernesto Laclau. To this charge, I suggest José would respond with an answer not entirely dissimilar to Moreiras, who has written that the world proposed by

Laclau at the end of his book *Emancipation(s)*—a world in which philosophy has come to its end in politics—would be "invivible," and that it would "dejarnos sin respiración."[2] The operative idea here is the same as that which José fiercely guards in his claim to occupy a space outside of politics. By scolding Pedro for rushing to politics, José also asserts that there is something "invivible" about that world, a world entirely captured by politics. José's interest is, rather, in "el mundo en el que estás viviendo" (00:17:27–00:17:29).

Infrapolitics, then, in response to the charge that its attunement to the existential excess which is never wholly captured by the political constitutes a wholesale abandonment of the political, responds with what it characterizes as a step back. This retreat, far from being a wholesale abandonment the political, attempts to carry out the task of thinking the conditions of the present, what Schürmann calls us to in the opening pages of in his posthumously published magnum opus, *Broken Hegemonies*: "To think is to linger on the conditions in which one is living, to linger on the site where we live. Thus, to think is a privilege of that epoch which is ours…" (3). For infrapolitics, this is a task which "begins with the dismantling of the primacy of the political over existence" (Williams 97). In practice, this attunement to the infrapolitical looks like its related term posthegemony, defined by Moreiras not as a political doctrine, but rather "an operational indicator…[that] prescribes nothing beyond the permanent use of thought at the service of a (pragmatic) refusal of domination, formally defined as hegemonic intrusion in singular life."[3]

Neither infrapolitics nor José in *Caballos salvajes* intends to abandon politics, but rather they attempt to privilege what Moreiras has referred to as "el referente maestro de la infrapolítica" which is, precisely, "la existencia" (*Infrapolítica*…127). In its prioritization of existence, infrapolitics does not turn its back on politics since it obviously understands that politics marks nearly every aspect of life. Similarly, José is cognizant of the real politics of his and Pedro's situation and is even clear headed enough to give it a name—*el*

sistema, as he terms it. But what he achieves is a sidestepping of the paradox of classical anarchism referred to earlier. Although he uses the language of archic paradigms ("soy anarquista") he does not set forth a new *archē* that would replace another, or to use Schürmann's language he does not substitute *principium* for *princeps*. In *Caballos salvajes*, José posits his own ownlessness, an an-*archē*-ological mode of being.

Mediatization

I have been arguing that the *something else* that is so important for the heist film genre is, in this case, infrapolitical. At every moment, José is closely attuned to what cannot be captured by politics, the realm of existence that he guards when Pedro accuses him of being political. But there is another aspect of the film that somewhat complicates this, an aspect that is directly relevant to the theme of the present dossier: mediatization.

Caballos salvajes is as much a film on the power of the image in the contemporary world as it is a film on infrapolitics, and the confluence of these two themes is what makes it so interesting. The emphasis on mediatization is, in fact, obvious from the opening scene, from before the heist is even officially set into motion. On his way to the bank, José brushes past a news reporter and cameraman filming a report and attempting to interview passersby on the street. The viewer is thus correctly led to believe that José is unconcerned with media, with spectacle, or with gaining any kind of fame from the whole scene. He is a man singularly focused on recuperating what was stolen from him so that he can reclaim a sense of freedom, even if he knows that the cost of this freedom will be his life (we might say that José is living authentically in the Heideggerian sense, aware and accepting of his own finitude). José's disinterest in media spectacle is reinforced a number of times throughout the film, but the presence of his unexpected partner in crime (the younger and politically naïve yet more charismatic Pedro) causes José to cede to a strategy

that remains at every point rather foreign to him—José and Pedro send a video of themselves directly to a national television news network, the network which employs the young reporter to whom José had denied a request for an interview while on his way to the bank to carry out the heist. The idea to use the news network as a tool emerges after Pedro views a television report in which his mother pleads publicly for her son's safety. While watching the report, Pedro is affected emotionally and later visits a local store to rent a video camera with which they film a message they will later mail to the Buenos Aires news station.

The viewer is led to wonder why this anarchist outlaw would consent to this type of media exposure. Why participate in self-surveillance in a situation in which one is trying, precisely, to evade? To not be exposed? Although José never explicitly mentions it, as a committed anarchist he is certain to be familiar with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's oft-quoted paragraph from the epilogue

Fig. 2. José and Pedro standing in front of a video camera.

to *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*: "*To be governed is to be kept in sight*, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so…*To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered*…" (294, emphasis mine). Whereas Proudhon here gives voice to anarchism's general distrust of surveillance, in *Caballos salvajes* José ends up putting himself (along with Pedro) under the watchful eye of the media, the nation, and the related security apparatuses. He stands before the camera willingly offering himself to synoptic viewing, thus creating a public archive of himself—a surprising decision for an anarchist outlaw.

We must ask ourselves what is at stake in this rather strange decision to self-surveil, even despite the fact that the duo attempts to maintain a sort of anonymity (they both regularly wear sunglasses, when making their first video they take care to remove any objects from the scene that might identify which hotel they are staying in, later in the film Pedro bleaches his hair blonde, etc.). The strategic choice to record themselves for the public has an uneasy resonance with the desire for exposure that Bernard Harcourt has diagnosed in what he terms the contemporary "expository society" (19). Writing on contemporary relationships to technological apparatuses like smartphones as well as mass-scale surveillance politics as governments and private companies attempt to archive everything and turn us all into pieces of data, Harcourt argues that no longer do we live in a society of the spectacle (Debord), a disciplinary society (Foucault), or even a society of control (Deleuze), but rather an expository society characterized precisely by our willing participation in our own surveillance. We expose ourselves despite knowing what our data are being used for, and we know that this exposition "renders us legible" to a long series of actors either "governmental, commercial, personal, or intimate" (15). José consents to this type of exposure despite anarchism's recognition of

the relationship between being "kept in sight" and being governed.

But if José willingly steps into this, it is ultimately in service of his persistent attempts to remain outside, to resist governmentality, to evade capture, to take a step back from the archic paradigm. The video tape that they mail to the national news organization serves as a testimony of the infrapolitical, as the creation of a public archive of the otherwise singular acts that, in this case, entails a step back from the political which is brought into being by a step into the public.

These persistent efforts end up constituting José as a non-governable subject in the sense that Malabou gives the term in *Stop Thief!* As noted above, in this book Malabou questions why some of the best-known 20th century philosophers stopped short of associating their philosophical anarchy with political anarchism. In her analysis, she proposes a novel distinction between the ungovernable and the non-governable, conceiving of the latter as "a space of encounter and communal efforts between philosophical anarchy(ism) and political anarchism" (23). The paragraph that distinguishes the two terms is worth quoting almost in full:

> The non-governable is not the ungovernable. The ungovernable refers to something that is out of control, like a vehicle that cannot be driven. ... The ungovernable is, and remains, nothing but the opposite of the governable. It resists and opposes what it assumes, namely, the priority of government. By contrast, non-governability refers neither to a lack of discipline, nor to errancy. And it does not refer to disobedience; rather, it refers to that which remains radically foreign to commanding and obeying... (23)

The non-governable would mark an outside, a relationship to governmentality that revels precisely in the non-relationship, in being entirely *other* than. Malabou goes on to write that while a government can respond to the ungovernable with either negotiation or repression, "by contrast, the non-

governable can only be dominated" (23). This is so because the non-governable exists entirely outside the archic paradigm and is thus wholly illegible to the dominant order.

This is the kind of subjectivity that José constructs for himself as the film goes on. His demand for justice and search for freedom is one that cannot be understood by the financial powers or the media or government apparatuses. He is so *other* to them that the only response they can finally muster once they catch up to him in the film's final scene is to shoot—to kill him from behind, anonymously, in the moment of his greatest sense of freedom and in a space (near the Chilean border) that represents the limits of national sovereign power. When José is killed at the hands of *el sistema*, it is because there is no relationship to governmentality possible, no possible negotiation or repression that could bring him back into the fold. The moment of his death retroactively deems him to have achieved the status of the non-governable, since "the non-governable is revealed after the fact" (218). This retroactive emergence of José as a non-governable subject is precisely the ineffable *something else* that lies at the heart of the heist film genre, and it is infrapolitical. Just as Malabou's non-governable is defined by its non-relationship to governmentality, so infrapolitics stakes out a radical outside.

I return to what I started with—there may be precisely nothing at stake here. José's infrapolitical mode of thinking and acting does not win him anything in the end other than what I claim is his successful sidestepping of the fundamental paradox of classical anarchism. On the contrary, he loses everything since this very mode of action leaves him without recourse to anything that we might otherwise recognize as politically legible opposition to *el sistema*. The most important point that we can positively assert about José's actions in this film is that he fiercely guards the absolute distinction between life and politics that characterizes infrapolitical thinking. In this way, infrapolitics is much like what Derrida writes in his 1983 "Letter to a Japanese

Friend" where he says that "deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one," emphasizing, rather simply, that "deconstruction takes place" (4). Perhaps the best we can do for infrapolitics in *Caballos salvajes* would be to make the parallel claim. In *Caballos salvajes*, infrapolitics takes place.

Notes

1 https://lacaneman.hypotheses.org/4316

2 https://infraphilosophy.com/2021/10/14/comentario-a-apropiacion-de-maquiavelo-una-critica-de-la-italian-theory-de-pier-paolo-portinaro-jose-miguel-burgos-mazas-y-carlos-otero-trads-madrid-guillermo-escolar-2021/

3 https://infraphilosophy.com/2020/07/17/on-hegemonic-intrusion-an-attempt-at-clarification/

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