

The Subalternist Turn in Latin American Postcolonial Studies, or, Thinking in the Wake of What Went Down Yesterday (November 8, 2016)

Gareth Williams

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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If you want, not to construct a theory, but to ascertain the condition in which man is actually placed, you will not ask yourself how it happens that the world is known, but how, in fact, man knows the world; and you will have to acknowledge the existence both of a world which lies beyond the mind, and of a mind which, far from passively reflecting the world, exercises itself on the world with the double aim of knowing it and transforming it.

(Simone Weil)



The publication in recent years of John Beverley's *Latinamericanism after 9/11* (2011) and Abraham Acosta's *Thresholds of Illiteracy* (2014) places the legacies of the subalternist turn in Latin American postcolonial studies once again at the center of interest. These are, however, very different books. *Latinamericanism after 9/11* forges a rationality of expedience and instrumentality that is guided exclusively by a pre-ordained desire to bring the theoretical register of the subalternist turn to closure under the banner of “post-subalternism”, or “real politics”, which, for the author, means the opposite of “theory”, or “deconstruction”. [\[1\]\[#N1\]](#) In contrast, *Thresholds of Illiteracy* posits a vital re-visitation of the critical-theoretical spirit of the subalternist turn in order to clarify, re-state and advance reading strategies with a view to furthering debate on the double register of knowing and transforming. The underlying logic of the first book is that of the passive acceptance of the laws of the given, conceiving of the political as reformist shifts in pre-existing social policy and systems of representation. The second book strives to turn its back on, and to detour away from, what I will define as *positive* reflection in the name of an alternative interpretative regime for the thinking of the political in Latin American postcolonial discourse, and, of course, in Latin America itself. *Latinamericanism after 9/11* articulates the need for oblivion—for the concealment of prior debates and critical energies in the name of re-suturing thought to the history of the cultural-nationalist state—while *Thresholds of Illiteracy* assumes the responsibility of a turning back toward unfinished, insufficient and erroneous readings of the relation between theory and the political, with a view to re-orienting the possibility of a return to the practice of thinking itself.

In the wake of the publication of these two works, the purpose of the current essay is to shed light on what can still be recuperated and thought through as a result of a subalternist turn that first began in the early 1990s, when the *Latin American Subaltern Studies Group* was formed by a small group of Latin Americanists that was striving to grapple with the realities of an emergent post-Soviet order, and with the difficulty of understanding the consequences for intellectual work on Latin America of an emerging transformation of the planetary *nomos*. In its first phase (spanning roughly 1992-1996) the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group was a small affinity-based reading group that would meet informally once a year, in a private conclave, to

share readings and discuss previously circulated scholarly work. This phase produced the Group's "Founding Statement" (1993). [2].[#N2]. In its second phase (1996-1998) the Group began to acquire the potential for broader practical and theoretical engagements. However, a number of members of the original Group refused to allow that potential to coalesce, and, as a consequence, the group split and never re-formed. [3].[#N3]

In the wake of the Group's definitive demise in 1998, we can now see that the "subalternist turn" in Latin American postcolonial studies produced three discursive, methodological, and conceptual variants, which I will examine in more detail in the pages that follow. I will state from the outset, however, that it is my estimation that of the three variants, only one can be considered to be a "turn" in anything even approximating a true sense, that is, as the mark of a departure offering the possibility of a detour, a deviation, or a divergence toward a difference from the nihilist world of the technologically given and the all-encompassing will to power of the modern subject. In contrast, the other two variants in question stage and reinstall entirely conformist conceptual and political relations to the creole laws of the post-Independence cultural and political traditions of modern and postmodern Latin America. Paraphrasing Acosta (5), two of the three variants thwart thought in advance, and are as such entirely counterproductive as either a cultural politics or as a path for thinking and addressing the question of the political that lies at the heart of the contemporary, post-Cold War *nomos*. They are, essentially, nihilism in process.



I. The Decolonial Variant, or Coloniality at Large

In the wake of the subalternist turn of the 1990s the so-called "decolonial option", coordinated and extended around the figure and writings of Walter Dignolo and others, has installed itself as *the* ubiquitous mode of postcolonial Latin Americanist thought in recent decades. On the cultural and historical levels this paradigm restages the basic logics of three foundational identitarian traditions from Latin America. The traditions in question are: (1) José Martí-inspired *Nuestroamericanismo*; (2) the identitarian legacies of Andean *indigenismo*, which, historically speaking, is a conceptual extension of the aforementioned creole *nuestroamericanismo* but in inverted form; (3) the Philosophy of Liberation that emerged from within the heterogeneous political forces of Argentine Peronism in the early 1970s. The latter sub-variant within the "decolonial option" is overtly Christian in its intentions and modalities, and was first promoted in 1970 by the Jesuit journal *Stromata* around the essentializing *modernista* question, "What is Latin American?" (Schutte, 177). This line of thought was subsequently championed by the Franciscan journal *Nuevo mundo* beginning in 1973. In their re-accommodation into the contemporary "decolonial option", the heterogeneities, inconsistencies, and basic incompatibilities underlying these historically and geographically distinct identitarian-Christian paradigms are systematically erased. As a result, while the intellectual trajectories and writings of Osvaldo Ardiles, Horacio Cerutti Guldberg and Arturo Roig are ignored, Enrique Dussel becomes the sole philosopher of liberation and "decoloniality", though it must also be pointed out that in this fully decisionist reconversion Dussel's work on Marxism is largely ignored (perhaps because Marx was not Latin American). [4].[#N4]

The second gesture of the "decolonial option" is to articulate the three aforementioned creole-Christian identitarian traditions from Latin America with U.S. university-style identity politics, or U.S. academic 'liberalism', which is built exclusively on discourses of identitarian exclusion and inclusion in the name of diversity. The third gesture is to then scaffold all of the above onto the legacy of dependency theory and Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis, even though under current conditions it is clear that the division of the world into core countries, semi-peripheral countries and peripheral countries has already succumbed to a spatial complexity for which world-systems analysis can no longer account. [5].[#N5]. Given its clearly Christian and creole identitarian underpinnings, it appears at first glance that decolonial thought might be little more than an ontotheological response to the contemporary crisis of ontotheology.

Within this initial overall context, the “decolonial option” also presents itself as an extension of Anibal Quijano’s observation from a 2000 essay published in the now defunct journal *Nepantla: Views from South* that post-Independence Latin America reveals a sustained “coloniality of power”. Quijano’s insight regarding the “coloniality of power” in Latin America is clearly significant, but not groundbreaking. After all, such an idea has been a mainstay of 20th century Marxist-*indigenista* thought in Latin America since the 1920s. For example, José Carlos Mariátegui was already clear about the duration of the colonial metaphysics of the post-Independence state-form in his 1928 essay on the religious factor in the Andean post-Independence period: “Amamantado por la catolicidad española, el Estado peruano [independiente] tenía que constituirse como Estado semifeudal y católico” (189). In other words, the colonial roots of the Latin American modern state-form are not, and have never really been, in dispute. The question, then, is how to establish a way of thinking that is capable of preparing the way for an alternative *telos*, or for a *turn* that is not always already acquiescent before the history of the onto-theological (i.e. the imperial) itself. Quijano’s essay, which is so frequently cited in the context of the vitality and originality of contemporary decolonial thought, does not prepare for a *turn* since it reinstalls the basic conditions of an Andean Marxist tradition built for the best part of a century on the critique of racial capitalism. I am not saying Quijano’s diagnosis is mistaken. I am saying that to the extent that it reproduces one of the basic tenets of the creole-*indigenista* tradition forged by José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s, it does not provide us with anything we did not know already.

Despite ending the essay with the warning that democratization under global conditions might no longer hinge on the broadening of modern subject-based rights, citizenship, and representation (that is, it might no longer depend on the deepening of the relation between cultural identity and the political), Quijano concludes with a return to a previous avatar of post-Independence thought that is grounded essentially in creole notions of citizenship, identity, difference and representation. In the end, it is the modern notion of ‘the People’ that hovers above the entire political life of what Quijano calls ‘the coloniality of power’: “It is time to learn to free ourselves from the Eurocentric mirror where our image is always, necessarily, distorted. It is time, finally, to cease being what we are not” (2008, 222). Quijano’s recourse to a Latin American ‘We’—a ‘People’ yet to be delivered up from historical alienation and yet to be born unto “our” true, and truly independent, metaphysical structure—is obviously an echo of José Martí’s famous *Nuestroamericanismo*: “A lo que es, allí donde se gobierna, hay que atender para gobernar bien; y el buen gobierno en América no es el que sabe cómo se gobierna el alemán o el francés, sino el que sabe con qué elementos está hecho su país” (27-8). But that is not all we can hear, for we can also hear echoes of Andrés Bello’s “Autonomía cultural de América” of 1848, as Quijano restages Bello’s admonition to the youth of Chile to aspire to the independence of thought by avoiding excessive servility to the science of civilized Europe. We could even go further back, however, to Simón Bolívar in 1819: “¿No dice el *Espíritu de las leyes* que éstas deben ser propias para el pueblo que las hace?, ¿que es una gran casualidad que las de una nación puedan convertir a otra?, ¿que las leyes deben ser relativas a lo físico del país, al clima, a la calidad del terreno, a su situación, a su extensión, al género de vida de los pueblos? . . . ¡He aquí el código que debíamos consultar y no el de Washington!” (quoted in Gómez-Martínez, 2). The end of Quijano’s essay, which has become one of the principle gateways into the thought of the so-called “decolonial option”, turns toward a centuries old tradition of creole Latin American thought that is grounded in *lo nuestro*, that can only be measured from within the imperial *nomos* of *criollismo*, and that remains subject at all times to its Christian anthropological ontology.

In the wake of the subalternist turn, the genealogies of the Latin American *criollista* tradition restage *cultural identity* as a form of salvation from the imperial *nomos* and from the time of unfettered capital. Given the continuity of its essentially *criollista* ground, there can be no actual “turn”, detour or deviance—no turning our backs on post-Independence regimes of representation—from within the decolonial variant of the subalternist turn. The decolonial option as a thought of the law of the Subject and of the Subject alone, and therefore as Latin-Romanic thought grafted onto European Enlightenment thought in its most rudimentary form, is more

a hindrance to decolonization than a help, for until there is a decolonization of the law of the Subject (that is, of identity thinking) there can be no decolonization at all. Until then the entire history of Western phallogocentrism (that is, the legacies of identity and difference; of the paternal, the familial, the fraternal, the Law, the Christian community, the hearth, the nation, the homo-philia, *lo nuestro* etc.) remains firmly in place in, and thanks to, the decolonial option, despite its accusations of Eurocentrism and its claims of a political and cultural alternative to the reigning nomos. As Abraham Acosta puts it in a reading strategy that is nevertheless distinct from the one presented in these pages, decolonial thought (as exemplified in the over 600-page tome, *Coloniality at Large*, edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos Jáuregui) “ultimately provides an unreliable mapping of the stakes and terms of postcolonial critique and its relationship to Latin America” (39). [6].[#N6]

II. The Popular Front Variant, or “Real Politics”

Setting aside the inconsistencies and limitations inherent to the development of decolonial metaphysics allows us to approach the remaining two variants that have also developed as a result of the subalternist turn in postcolonial thinking on and in Latin America since the 1990s. The second variant is that of a Popular Front-style cultural nationalist humanism that defines itself primarily in its rejection of what it calls “deconstruction”, and in its positive valorization of hegemony, understanding the latter as the fabrication of positive power, common sense, or form of social rationalization that is built on, and that is only made possible through, its relation to a subaltern ‘other’, which is the exclusion or negation of that power and of its ideological presuppositions.

For this second populist-humanist variant of subalternism, for which the work of John Beverley has been perhaps the prime referent, the question is only ever how the subaltern subject can become a hegemonic subject (a process that Beverley refers to as “real politics”). As Abraham Acosta shows with utmost clarity in *Thresholds of Illiteracy*, the populist variant of the subalternist turn grounds itself repeatedly in a symptomatic misreading of Gayatri Spivak’s seminal essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” This is a misreading that allows nevertheless for the unconditioned assertion of subjectivist positivity over and above all other modalities of political thinking. Thanks to Acosta’s argument, we can see how the field of Latin American postcolonial thought has responded to Spivak’s essay almost overwhelmingly, and insufficiently, by saying “yes (the subaltern can speak) *and* no (we just don’t listen)” (52). But, as Acosta warns us, something quite fundamental is lost in this limited, and limiting, response:

By and large, the terms by which this essay has been appropriated or dismissed in the field stems from a fundamentally (and doubly) metaleptic reading, for while “Can the Subaltern Speak?” persists as the *only* question that elicits a response, the more critical intervention the essay invokes (“Are we [intellectuals] assuming a pure form of consciousness?”) continues to go overlooked and dis-acknowledged. In many ways, the response [*yes/no*] . . . grants the subaltern an identity within the Latin American scene of cultural intelligibility, but as a positive entity completely devoid of its relational, structural, and ultimately heterogeneous critical import. As such, this reply signals not only an adherence to ontological assumptions vis-à-vis the subaltern (understood in positive terms: i.e., “flesh and blood”) but also a certain unproblematic expectation of a direct, unmediated political relation of solidarity with or through them . . . “Can the subaltern speak?” is *not* the primary question Spivak’s essay ultimately poses. (52)

What is erased in the positive metaphysics of populist subjectivism is the real question: ““Are we [intellectuals] assuming a pure form of consciousness?” Indeed, it was this very question that grounded my

critique of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group's "Founding Statement" in 1996, though the practitioners of the populist and decolonial variants of subaltern studies have never provided a response to a question that essentially challenges the relation between postcolonial thinking and the intellectual will to power. In 2011 the author of *Latinamericanism after 9/11* systematically avoids the question in order to give voice to his overall frustration with what he calls "deconstruction", and in order to prop up his declarations of solidarity with the so-called *marea rosada* of Latin American progressive states (a number of whom have since ceased to exist, in the process shedding light on the limited efficacy of book-length declarations of subjective solidarity emitted from the universities of the North).

In the past two decades, the populist-humanist variant of the subalternist turn has not varied its script. In his 1999 book *Subalternity and Representation* Beverley thought that what was at stake in the relation between hegemony and subalternity was "the pertinence of deconstruction as a model for new forms of political imagination and practice" (1999, 97-8). More importantly, what was at stake was his view of the inappropriateness of deconstruction for subaltern studies. He reproduced those same views over a decade later in *Latinamericanism after 9/11* (2011). Both times, however, the author misses the point of what is really at stake, because deconstruction can never be a model for, and it is certainly never pertinent to, anything in particular. As Acosta points out, "deconstruction does not inhabit any discursive sphere of its own; it refers to a condition (and process) of meaning always already at work within discursivity itself, one that makes visible the contradictions of signification and referentiality inscribed at the core of any pronouncement of knowledge or authority" (22). As such, it is nothing more than conceptual preparation for thinking through the enigmas or aporias of the political, the conceptual work that can be done in order to consider the limitations and promise of the critique of the political and its modern legacies. Beverley reproduced Román de la Campa's opinion that deconstruction is little more than a melancholy attachment that cannot detach itself from its conditions of possibility (Beverley, 2011, 55). Both opinions, however, are ultimately erroneous.

Deconstruction prepares the terrain for the singular disruption of the given not from within melancholy attachments that it cannot exceed but in the name of rendering inoperative the everyday walls of sameness and difference, the legacies of the metaphysics of closure, and the political and cultural traditions built on centuries of ontotheological subsumption (hegemony, in other words). As such, there is no melancholy attachment in or through deconstruction. It would be safe to say that it is in fact the precise opposite. Deconstruction binds us to the immanent un-work of the *alter* and obliges that we face the question of responsibility that is uncovered in its wake. John Beverley, however, criticizes deconstruction because it "is always bound to interrupt the constitution of the subaltern as a subject of history" (1999, 102). But again this misses the point, because in order to become a "subject of history" the subaltern, who is so because she is positioned as such by hegemony, has to internalize the interpellation of, and thereby enter, or become, hegemony. She has to internalize hegemony as the location and essence of her own being in the same way the heart of the factory worker is forced to beat from within the chest of the capitalist, as Marx put it. By definition, the subaltern cannot be a subject of history understood in the sense suggested by Beverley. That is, she can never be an autonomous plenitude. As Spivak put it, "the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic" (16) (a formulation that was explored extensively in my 2002 book, *The Other Side of the Popular*, which I will return to below).

Deep down, what is really at stake is that the populist-humanist variant of subaltern studies views the political exclusively as the *positive* closure of thought and action around the hegemony-subalternity dyad: "The question is . . . whether subaltern studies can contribute to organizing a new form of hegemony from below—what Guha calls a 'politics of the people'" (1999, 104). In such positivity there is no possible exteriority to, and no substantive transfiguration of, a political power/knowledge relation that is always already established by hegemony. As a result, within this positive closure of thought and action around hegemony there is no possibility of "a radical negativity within academic disciplinarity", which is what this variant purportedly seeks

(Beverley, 2005, 355). The latter—radical negativity—is utterly incompatible with the former—the closure of thought around hegemony—because hegemony only ever organizes the repression.

Here we see that in the populist-humanist variant of subaltern studies there is a fundamental distinction between *affirmation* and *positivity*. Hegemonic politics (which Beverley now refers to “*post*-subalternism”) is a politics of the positive, over and above what it negates (which is subalternity). In this sense “*Post*-subalternism”, which is the logical consequence of twenty years of Popular Front-style humanism, is not subaltern studies—not the critical reconsideration of the mere fact of political reason itself—because it is actually and only ever the thought of, and for, hegemonic positivity.

Obviously, what we see is that there is a fundamental contradiction lying at the heart of an instrumentalist politics of hegemonic positivity that is forged in the name of a politics of subalternity. After all, this kind of politics is only ever grounded, in spite of its claims to “real politics”, in a politics predicated on acquiescence before an “always already internalized agreement to the rules of the hegemonic game” (Moreiras, 2001, 283). As a result, by logical definition, there is no “turn” available to us in the populist-humanist variant of subalternist postcolonial studies, or “*post*-subalternism”, because this variant installs entirely conformist conceptual and political relations to the laws of populist hegemony, and, therefore, to the laws of the organization and administration of repression itself. It is, in this sense, nihilism in its basic form, since it refuses to question, never mind strive to de-suture, the originary intimacy between violence, immunity, *communitas* and the reproduction of the political via subjective fidelity, the extension of norms, and the positive administration of wills. The populist-humanist variant of subalternist postcolonial studies conforms to the understanding of the political as the positive administration of violence, and there is nothing less subalternist than that because subaltern studies was the critique of the will to power of the modern history of political subjectivity in Latin America.

Another factor to be taken into consideration is the changing status of the populist-humanist variant in the context of a neoliberalism that is now state-form itself, rather than merely its critique, as it was in the 1970s, 1980s and at least part of the 1990s. The populism of both left and right in the post-2001 period tends to be the reenactment or restaging of the recognizable languages and conceptual logics of the nation, rights, citizenship, inclusion, anti-imperialism, hegemony theory, chains of equivalence etc, but at a moment in which classical populism can no longer lay claim so easily to the political legitimacy of the nation-state. Neoliberalism is no longer the external critique of the import substitution industrialization state-form, as it was until perhaps just a decade ago. Now populism is the very language and practice of a state-form that purports to act as a restrainer against imperial or negative external forces, or against the ravages of global capitalism in its financial vein, while simultaneously guaranteeing at all cost the relation between resource extraction and the interests of global corporate finance. This is no longer the proto-revolutionary populism of the national inclusion and citizenship of the import substitution period of development, of insertion into a notion of ‘the public’ forged in relation to the state as the central mediator for the fabrication of the national fictive ethnicity (the ‘People’). This is now a populism that presents itself as a reformist political force while guaranteeing the benefits of extractivist rent redistribution; rents, of course, that remain fully dependent upon the vagaries of global commodity markets. It is a populism that makes claims to the state as a restraining force yet acquiesces entirely in the face of external economic domination and determination. In the recent case of Latin America, as soon as global commodity prices begin to drop the legitimacy of the “*marea rosada*” state is called into question, the social flows of rent redistribution and consumption diminish (either in real or perceived terms), and the classic oligarchy, with its historical ties to the most reactionary forces of the military-business class, return in civilian form to take over the national business model in the name of a more efficient (or “less corrupt”) neoliberal business ethos, and do so either by the ballot box as in Argentina or by a corporate-style hostile takeover by political-economic cartels who refer to themselves as “political parties”, as in Brazil.

In this staging of naked economic domination, constitutional democracy relives its death over and over again, while a more recalcitrant extractivist neoliberalism is ushered in to cure the ills of a social field grounded essentially in the social-democratic/authoritarian administration of consumerism and debt. Populism is no longer about actually creating an idea of the public in conjunction with the state, in a relation of antagonism with the historical oligarchy; it is considerably more about accessing the benefits of rent redistribution in the interests of consumerism and collective debt, or at best struggling for the survival of public enclaves (the non-privatized university, for example) in the face of the resource-oriented interests of global financial capital.

Within this process Ernesto Laclau's theory of hegemony truly hits a roadblock (to name just one theory in crisis, for dependency theory suffered a similar fate decades ago), though the determining factors behind that fatal impact have actually been with us for years. Having said that, populism of both left and right is still the dominant political modality of our times, and as such remains to be thought in a new light—in a differential mode—at a distance from the history of its common sense and inherited *katechontic* (that is, its political-theological) function, which is no small matter of course. [7],[#N7]

If the political model of the hegemonic “chain of equivalences” can not only no longer be de-sutured from the absolute domination of global financialized capital and consumption, but is in fact subsumed a priori by that domination (as has been seen recently not only in reference to the *mare rosada* states of Latin America, the Greek fiasco of 2015, and the U.S. presidential elections of 2016), then it would appear that another path—third variant—needs to be considered in order to conceptualize the possibility of a turn in the relation between thinking the political and acting politically.

III. The Posthegemonic Variant, or Turn

The following question affords us the opportunity to begin to delineate a fundamental distinction between the populist-humanist, the decolonial, and the third and final variant in the subalternist of the 1990s turn to be addressed in these pages, which refers to the question of *posthegemony*:

Is it possible to salvage some kind of anti-systemic productivity in our transitional times for a mode of knowledge that would seem to depend almost entirely on epistemological models bequeathed by modernity at the very moment in which modernity becomes a thing of the past? (Moreiras, 2001, 76).

In an era in which capital has no exteriority and no alternative, in which the nation-state system has been captured by the subsumption of labor to capital on a global scale, is there a viable way to think something other than the technical reproduction of the given, when the given is the de-structuration of modern conceptions of political space without inaugurating any true difference in the present? Under current conditions, can there be such a thing as a viable *preparation for something other* than the vociferous, nihilist conformism of the decolonial option and Popular Front-style humanism in Latin American postcolonial thinking?

In contrast to the two variants already outlined in these pages, and as already seen in the question cited from Alberto Moreiras' 2001 book, *The Exhaustion of Difference*, posthegemony is predicated on, and is predicated on raising the very question of, epochality. Quite literally, *posthegemony* is the question of time, of the times, and of our time. More specifically, it is predicated on the understanding of the end of the Cold War and the closure of metaphysics as the end of epochality itself, which is obviously a different register of reflection from that of Francis Fukuyama's early 1990s gospel of the 'end of history'.

Given its title, it is perhaps natural that for many readers *posthegemony* is connected primarily to the publication in 2010 of Jon Beasley-Murray's book *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*. [8].[#N8] However, the concept was first addressed in the field of Latin American postcolonial thought in Alberto Moreiras' *The Exhaustion of Difference* (2001) and my own *The Other Side of the Popular* (2002). They are three very different books, working in distinct ways around a shared set of concerns and issues regarding globalization and the question of the political. *The Other Side of the Popular* and *The Exhaustion of Difference* came directly out of the moment and intellectual experience of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group in its 1996-1998 phase, with a more or less common conceptual genealogy and *destructive* register that could be summed up in general terms as an engagement with Latin America's main post-Independence cultural and political traditions, the genealogies of Marx-Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida, the postcolonial legacy of South Asian subaltern studies, and psychoanalysis. On the other hand, Beasley-Murray's *Posthegemony* displaces the majority of these critical genealogies (in particular the Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida legacy) stating that he is "not content with deconstruction" (5). The author of *Posthegemony* begins by refusing the existence of hegemony and its historical efficacy (for instance, its ability to capture and depoliticize). It could be said, of course, that this initial gesture understates the central question of the 'hegemonic apparatus' in Gramsci and overstates the idea that hegemony is inherently and only ever incomplete; a mere fiction. Nevertheless, Beasley-Murray's book displaces questions of ideology, consciousness, and subjectivity in favor of prioritizing *affect*, *habitus* and the *multitude* as the positive figures for posthegemonic thinking, voicing his discomfort with what he calls "the labor of the negative" in previous articulations of posthegemonic thinking. In contrast to the positions developed in *Posthegemony*, of course, in *The Exhaustion of Difference* and *The Other Side of the Popular* real politics is understood as the positive (that is, biopolitical) administration of power and, therefore, of violence. Therefore, to the extent that posthegemony in the early 2000s is the critique of the biopolitical understanding of power—of a power that does not saturate the realm and experience of the political—the reader can see that within the general framework of posthegemonic thinking there remains a tendency that remains convinced that it cannot be advanced without addressing the negative in one way or another.

Beasley-Murray, in contrast, strives to give a positive valence to affect, habitus and the multitude. However, the question of the relation of affect to *will to power*, and, as a result, to the nihilist subjectivism of the contemporary, remains to be clarified in *Posthegemony*. In this regard, let us not forget Nietzsche's observation, which was taken up by Heidegger after World War II, that "*will to power* is the primitive form of affect, [and] all other affects are but its configurations" (Heidegger, 42). One is left wondering to what extent this fundamental formulation equating affect to will to power would undermine or challenge the direct correlation that Beasley-Murray establishes between affect and posthegemonic thinking *per se*. Habitus, it could be said, cannot be considered independently from *ethos* or *doxa*, and, as such, from notions of custom, duty, and unitary or common law (it cannot be separated from the historical inflections of *nomos*, in other words). As I note in 2002 in *The Other Side of the Popular*, for Bourdieu habitus refers to "structured structures" that deploy "embodied history internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history". In this sense, habitus might also benefit from further evaluation in *Posthegemony* in order to clarify its proximity to, or distance from, the subjectivist premise and lived justification of the common law or *doxa* of the nihilist age of *techne*, which is the given, fully en-framed, concealing (second nature, or common sense) world we already experience. Finally, it is clear in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) that the concept of the *multitude* is part and parcel of the contemporary installation and unfolding of political theology; that is, the multitude is God on Earth with Saint Francis as its emblematic intellectual figure. In *Posthegemony*, Beasley-Murray works extensively to distance his understanding of the multitude from that of Hardt and Negri. It could be said, however, that the concept of the multitude still tends toward the positive valuation of the anthro-lococentric—toward the gathering of the human as the sole determination of the political— thereby

perhaps suggesting the possibility of a lingering subjectivist metaphysics that remains to be worked through and fully deconstructed in this approach to political theory and posthegemonic thinking in Latin America. Indeed, it is precisely for this reason that I strive in *The Other Side of the Popular* to distance posthegemony from anthropo-logocentrism by adopting Gayatri Spivak's definition of subalternity not as 'the subaltern subject' (as in the decolonial and Popular Front subalternist variants) but as "the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic". Whether I am fully successful in this is another question, of course. Having said that, the definition of subalternity as the limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic helps us bring the question of posthegemony back to the fundamental issue of historicity, epochality, and the contemporary question of the political.

In his 2001 book Alberto Moreiras produced a fundamental and systematic deconstruction of the very configuration of an entire field, or regional ontology ('Latinamericanism'), at the time of an emergent *interregnum* that only a very few were referring to as *globalization* back then. *The Exhaustion of Difference* was a work of *destruction* that sought nothing other than the de-narrativization of the metaphysical fantasies and fatal conceptual conceits of all identity thinking in relation to modern and contemporary Latin America and Latin Americanist reflection, while also insisting on the ways to guarantee the conceptual regeneration of that same field of reflection, which Moreiras referred to as the labor of "Second Order Latinamericanism". The term *posthegemony* was mentioned by Moreiras only on the most rare of occasions in this book, and was generally understood as that which lies beyond all possible capture by hegemony and hegemonic thought. It is clear, however, that the book in its entirety, and, in particular, in its opening to "Second Order Latinamericanism", is a sustained engagement with a specifically posthegemonic intellectual practice. Posthegemony in *The Exhaustion of Difference* is a thought that questions the limits of any given hegemonic relation (for example, the hegemony-subalternity relation in a given moment, text, event or historical constellation). It does so as a means of shedding light on the incompatibility between the cultural politics of hegemony and the site of subaltern exclusion. Since hegemonic politics "can always abolish some subalternities but can never abolish them all—it needs them as that on which it constitutes itself" (2001, 285), the idea was to convert the inevitable incompleteness and imperfection of hegemonic interpellation into the basic code for an opening, within theory and practice, to alternative articulations ('worldings' or experiences) of the political. Posthegemony in this work was therefore a wager for the transfiguration of the relation between the political and the articulation of the university's (and therefore the field's) inherited power/knowledge configuration. The whole point of Second-Order Latinamericanism at that time was to interrupt the constitution of hegemony (not that of the subaltern) in the name of a politics *other than* that of a hegemony-subalternity relation built for the sole purpose of subordination. In other words, the problem was and still is 'hegemony', when it is taken to be the sole ground of the political. Second-Order Latinamericanism was a wager that politics does not have to exhaust itself within a hegemony-subalternity relation that always works against the subaltern. In this sense, posthegemony emerged as active solidarity with subalternity as a result of the negative work, or deconstruction, it carries out in relation to hegemony. This was posthegemony's *affirmation* and insistence at that time, as well as being the ground of its double aim of knowing the world and transforming it. Posthegemony, if considered in all its possibilities, marked the site for a preparatory clearing of the disciplinary way, a clearing to push "the institutional limits of disciplinary thinking, as much as we are able to do, in order to see what happens then" (Moreiras, 2001, 300). The field of Latin American postcolonial thinking, however, either blocked or ignored the underlying potential of such a preparatory clearing, and did so generally in favor of decolonial metaphysics.

Similarly, in my development of specific case studies throughout the second half of *The Other Side of the Popular*, posthegemony came to be defined as the theoretical and practical, that is, the experiential site at which both hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses cease to make sense. The Nietzschean-Derridean *perhaps* that was developed in the second part of that book was defined as "the greatest gift posthegemony has

to offer”, meaning that posthegemony uncovers meanings other than those that are immediately handed over to the history, metaphors and reproduction of instrumental reason (historicism, humanism, or the modern philosophy of history). Posthegemony in this work remains extraneous to the interests of hegemony and of hegemonic thought (so called “real politics”), thereby challenging the forging of chains of equivalence between subject positions, and always striving to do so without necessarily replacing them with other master narratives. In other words posthegemony was, in the second half of *The Other Side*, both an epochal diagnosis (a sign of our times, let’s say, in which hegemony can no longer account for, nor restrain, contemporary patterns of domination) and a deconstruction of the *genealogical* (of the inheritance of the ideology of the subject, for example) in the name of a heterogeneous, democratic, uncontainable, often underlying or infra-hegemonic force.

Posthegemony, in this sense, emerged in the early 2000s as a democratic thought and practice that sought to deconstruct the determinations of the political in the name of freedom. *The Other Side of the Popular*’s final footnote references Paz Errazuriz and Diamela Eltit’s approach to the mad lovers of the Putaendo hospital outside of Santiago de Chile in the mid 1990s, as Eltit tries to shed light on why there are so many mad lovers in such an inhospitable, “impossible”, place. “He gives me tea with bread and butter” “I take care of her”, the mad patients reply to her question, in the process giving voice to the infrapolitical difference from the political that always flows beneath the political, as Moreiras recently defined the question of the infrapolitical, extending the scholarship already developed in his book *Línea de sombra* (2006). From a posthegemonic perspective, this infrapolitical excess or difference from the political—in a kind of a-principial, non-subjectivist politic that traverses both necessity and care, and that remains both prior and posterior to “real politics”—offers the basis for a posthegemonic practice of democracy capable of challenging the inherited determinations of the biopolitical, and of doing so in the name of existence, or, in this specific case, of love in spite of everything. This is essentially where *The Other Side of the Popular* ends. It might be considered to be a romantic ending. I would say it is not so in the classical (subjectivist) sense; it is an end that tries to point to the possibility of a different treatment of, or care for, the world even in the most socially determined of places. That is, I think, what posthegemony was in the early 2000s, and what it still promises, in spite of what might still be referred to as its “labor of the negative”.

But what of posthegemony’s relation to epochality? Building on the insights of Paul Bové, Moreiras’ *The Exhaustion of Difference* was to my mind the first book in the tradition of Latin American postcolonial thinking to try to identify the constitutive symptoms of the time of the *interregnum* we now refer to as globalization, and to reorient, or turn, those symptoms systematically toward a new understanding of intellectual responsibility. Through the concept of “operational whitewash”, *The Other Side of the Popular* was perhaps the first book in the tradition of Latin American postcolonial thinking to try to understand the peculiar question of the temporal de-structuration of the modern apparatus of development that the *interregnum* was opening up before us just a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It did not do so systematically, consciously. Rather, it hit upon the issue in its final chapter. However, it was also perhaps the first book in the subalternist turn to characterize globalization as an emergent war of all against all, within an overall context characterized by the destructuration of modern political space (173-213), which is what Carlo Galli would later characterize as “global war”.

As a result of the apparently limitless violence unleashed in the wake of 9/11, it has become clear that the end of the Cold War and the subsequent globalization of unfettered, financialized capital has initiated much more than it was possible to account for in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Now it is increasingly clear that we are witnessing the violent breakdown of the restraining force of the imperial *nomos* that originated in the sixteenth century, that consolidated the bourgeois revolutions internal to the European imperial state system, that provided a grammar of unification for the emergence and extension of the modern nation-state, reaching its apotheosis at the beginning of the twentieth century. Now it is increasingly clear that the definitive

dissolution of the planetary nomos was held at bay by two imperial world wars (which perhaps could be considered to be extended European civil wars), Keynesian welfare economics, and the Cold War restraining division of the planet into first, second, and third worlds, which prolonged the history of containment between state and non-state capitalisms.

The era of the revolutions of the national bourgeoisies had come to a definitive close by the mid-1970s. This marks the advent of the global financial revolution, which is also the signal crisis of US military-Keynesian hegemony. [9].[#N9]. Capital therefore had to overcome its legislative and territorial constraints in order to launch a new era of profitability. As a result the relation between capital, state, and working class has been de-sutured by the advent of the new global division of labor. With the ongoing dissolution of the bourgeois imperial *katechon*, of national capitals sutured to the discourses of economic and societal development, underdevelopment and dependency; of clearly defined centers and peripheries, and therefore of insides and outsides, the wars that used to appear as the performance of territorialized sovereign legitimacy now emerge as conflicts over access to extractable and exploitable resources and labor on a planetary scale.

The modern nomos has entered into a state of collapse and we are living times of total economic mobilization and spatial de-structuration characterized by the ultra-violence of narco-accumulation and the rampant extraction of resources not only in Latin America—in which the so-called leftist governments of the *marea rosada* have been key players too, of course—but in any space virtually anywhere on the planet deemed available for the extraction of value. This is the time of spatial and political de-containment, and posthegemony is the sign and diagnosis of its peculiar, post-developmental epochality. Within this context, the very terms of debate on the possible pathway toward a conceptual and practical turn, detour, deviation, or divergence have had to shift.

The conceptual and practical weight we assign to the *closure of metaphysics*—or not, as the case may be—is absolutely central to this discussion. With the death of God (Nietzsche) and the destruction of the metaphysical-ontotheological ground for thought (Heidegger), we confront the closure of metaphysics hand in hand with the advent of absolute technological en-framing (*techne*) on a planetary scale. Reiner Schürmann offers the fundamental diagnosis in *Broken Hegemonies* that in the current epoch—that of the closure of metaphysics, which is *the closure of epochality itself*—we are witnessing the gradual and unforgiving breakdown of any *arche* previously capable of grounding thought and action. In this sense, the time of the closure of metaphysics is *an-archic* (in which case, neoliberalism is merely a symptom of, and the attempt to further conceal, a far deeper conceptual-existential conundrum). The closure of metaphysics does not indicate a transition to other forms—for here there is no Hegelian *Aufhebung* available—unless the sovereign decisionism of so-called “real politics” intervenes to oversimplify matters for us.

Within this context, the infrapolitical—the difference or distance from the political that always flows beneath the political (Moreiras, 2015)—remains inextricably linked at all times to posthegemony, and is essential to any formulation of a posthegemonic democratic thought and practice, since together they exist like a partition of sorts; a partition that divides while joining and separates while combining. This is, let’s say, the condition of the co-implication between the infrapolitical and posthegemonic democratic thought and practice. To my mind, one of the most concise formulations of the stakes of a specifically infrapolitical-posthegemonic proposition in specific relation to the question of epochality can be found in Jorge Álvarez Yágüez’s essay “Crisis epocal: la política en el límite”, which is included in an important collection of essays titled “Infrapolítica y posthegemonía”. In this essay Álvarez Yágüez notes that the inheritance of the *koinon*—which is the originary principle or foundation (*arche*) that determines our understanding of the common, the public, the res publica, *nomos*, the commonwealth, the people, and the modern structure of sovereignty, of course—is such that the political is, in conceptual terms, consolidated and instituted in such a way as to guarantee the possibility of a relation to the One (the Aristotelian *pros hen*). What we understand to be the common has only



ever been, in all its historical variants, the fully determined, principal relation to the One. This is the principle that organizes and gives specific body to the daily existence and experience of the political. For example, Hegel's Romanic-imperial instantiation of the One is evident in his 1806 correspondence with Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, which Carlo Galli also references in *Global War*: "I saw the Emperor—this world-soul—riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it" (141-2). Hegel is clearly intoxicated with the mere sight of the auratic imperial power of the One. It is not by chance, then, that Jean-Luc Nancy has posited that freedom has been thoroughly subordinated to the determination of an ontology of subjectivity, in which *Being* is understood as the *subjectum* of representation, and freedom is the act of appearing to oneself. Obviously the emergence of the nation-state as the principle foundation of the post-1648 Westphalian world order, or the ascension of individual consciousness as the *arche* of the bourgeois Enlightenment subject in post-Renaissance philosophy and politics, are refortifications of an originary concept—the One, the Subject, consciousness etc—that has been waning and reinstating itself so forcefully for millennia. Needless to say, such refortifications and iterations have been fundamental for the historic territorialization of capital and the modern nation-state. Communitarianism, the commons, neo-communism, de-colonial thought and the theories of the multitude are all theories of a subjectivist will to power grounded not in the closure of metaphysics but in the decisionist/subjectivist *closure of the closure of metaphysics* extended in the name of the Aristotelian *pros hen*. All these theoretical political formulations are themselves deeply invested in the ontological politics inherent in Hegel's Romanic imagination. By this I mean to suggest that they do not offer an alternative solution, or a turn of any kind. They are, quite simply, more of the same (namely, domination experienced as a "wonderful sensation", as Hegel put it).

The infrapolitical, on the other hand, bears witness to the fact that these positions are the embodiment of the nihilism that already possesses us (*techne*, the will to power, or the calculations of the relation between means and ends). The infrapolitical inhabits the very problem of the political from within the closure of epochality, that is, from within the very problem of the ontological difference between Being and beings, and merely strives to advance a thought that remains at a distance from the nihilist legacies of subjectivist decisionism that we have inherited from the modern and its Latin-Romanic, humanist antecedents.

To reduce our nihilist subjectivist legacies to rubble, to a point of suspension or inoperativity, is to think and write in preparation for a renovation and potential turn in our thinking of the post-Cold War interregnum, or, as Carlo Galli calls it, the time of "global war". To my mind, and here we come full circle, infrapolitical posthegemonic democracy is epochal diagnosis and destruction grounded in the clearing away of the subordination of freedom to the ontology of subjectivity. It is the clearing away of the *subjectum* of representation not in order to get rid of representation, but in order to redefine the relation of representation itself to the political. This is still the work of the *perhaps* (Moreiras refers to it as democratic *marranismo* [2016]) that takes us simultaneously back to the subalternist turn of the 1990s and forward toward the infrapolitical excess or difference from the political that is the endless, a-principal, non-subjectivist repertoire through which posthegemonic democracy can be discussed and traversed in both thought and practice, in the epoch of the closure of epochality that traverses everything we do and think today. Such a turn, it might be said, is disconnected from the decisionism of "real politics". So be it. Its conceptual distance is fundamental to the possibility of a clearing, and turn, worthy of the name.

Notes

1. For further critical readings of this work, see the collection of essays in Steinberg et al., *Política común* 4 (2013). Also see Moreiras, *Marranismo*, 2016, 77-102. [♣ \[#N1-pt1\]](#)
2. For a critical reading of the Group's "Founding Statement", see Williams (1996). [♣ \[#N2-pt1\]](#)

3. For the most significant work related directly to the lifespan of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, see Beverley (1999), Moreiras (2001), Williams (2002), plus the edited volumes by Rabasa, Sanjinés & Carr, and Rodríguez. In 2005 Bruno Bosteels observed that the subalternist turn “signals the need to register the structural inadequacy of the discourses and practices of university knowledge, precisely by teaching and learning, as much as by unlearning, from the absence, the vanishing presence, of the subaltern”. Subaltern studies “no longer projects the nostalgia for past dreams onto the future but rather raises the question whether an as yet undreamt-of politics of the post-hegemonic, or infra-hegemonic, can be conceived at all” (156). This then produces the following question: “Is there, in other words, a retreat from the double bind of hegemony and the subaltern—a withdrawal that would not be an escape but rather an exodus, and thus the promise of a new beginning?” (156). Ten years later the idea of a “new beginning” is, conceptually and practically speaking, inconceivable. [\[#N3-ptri\]](#)
4. For a lucid explanation of the differences between Osvaldo Ardiles, Horacio Cerutti Guldberg and Arturo Roig, see Schutte (175-205). [\[#N4-ptri\]](#)
5. See Marramao and Galli. [\[#N5-ptri\]](#)
6. Also see the following: “No habrá descolonización efectiva de América Latina, ni del conocimiento latinoamericanista, esto es, no habrá ninguna crítica genuinamente democrática de la razón imperial, sobre la base de los varios supuestos y tan celebrados descubrimientos, revelaciones, y procedimientos que ofrece el decolonialismo. La opción decolonial, para hablar claro, no es una crítica democrática de la razón imperial, ni pretende serlo. Lo malo es que, entonces, se convierte en una crítica imperial de la razón imperial, o, lo que es lo mismo, una crítica colonial de la razón colonial” (Moreiras, *Marranismo*, 2016, 92-3). [\[#N6-ptri\]](#)
7. See Moreiras, “Sobre populismo y política” (2016). [\[#N7-ptri\]](#)
8. For a recent collective approximation to some of the questions raised in reference to posthegemony, see Castro Orellana (2015). [\[#N8-ptri\]](#)
9. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed “a major intensification of competitive pressures on each and every governmental and business organization of the capitalist world-economy and in a consequent massive withdrawal of money capital from trade and production. The switch occurred in the critical years 1968-73. It was during these years that deposits in the so-called Eurodollar or Eurocurrency market experienced a sudden upward jump followed by twenty years of explosive growth. And it was during these same six years that the system of fixed parities between the main national currencies and the US dollar and between the US dollar and gold, which had been in force throughout the phase of material expansion, was abandoned in favor of the system of flexible or floating exchange rates—a system which some regard not as a system at all, but as the form taken by the crisis of the pre-existing system” (Arrighi, 307-8). The crisis of the US regime traversed three distinct and closely related areas: “Militarily, the US army got into ever more serious troubles in Vietnam; financially, the US Federal Reserve found it difficult and then impossible to preserve the mode of production and regulation of world money established at Bretton Woods; and ideologically, the US government’s anti-communist crusade began losing legitimacy both at home and abroad” (Arrighi, 309). [\[#N9-ptri\]](#)

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