

The *Insistence* that is Posthegemony: Negativity, Technique, and the Question of Alienation

Gareth Williams*

Recibido: 08-07-2021 / Aceptado: 08/10/2021

Abstract. In this essay, hegemony in traditional Marxism is posited as a social ontology based on overcoming the alienation of the masses. The aim of hegemony is to produce the full realization through the work of the proletariat as one specific political subject, as a collective version of the bourgeois subject. The emancipation through hegemony marks the self-realization of the proletariat as the subject of history, as one subject that somehow imposes itself on the alienated forms of capitalism. On the other hand, posthegemony is thought from the decline of the subjectivist and productivist idolatry of hegemony, from the end of its expired truth, in the name of another promise.

Keywords: Hegemony; Alienation; Negativity; Marx; Lenin; Gramsci; Traditional Marxism; Laclau & Mouffe; Americanism; Afro-pessimism.

[es] La *insistencia* que es la poshegemonía: La negatividad, la técnica y la cuestión de la alienación

Resumen. En este ensayo se plantea la hegemonía en el Marxismo tradicional como una ontología social basado en la superación de la alienación de las masas. La intención de la hegemonía es producir la plena realización mediante el trabajo del proletariado en cuanto sujeto político concreto, como una versión colectiva de la ontología del sujeto burgués. La emancipación mediante la hegemonía marca la auto-realización del proletariado como sujeto de la historia, como un sujeto que de alguna manera prevalece sobre las formas alienadas del capitalismo. La poshegemonía, por otro lado, piensa desde el ocaso de la idolatría subjetivista y produccionista de la hegemonía, desde el fin de su verdad caduca, en nombre de otra promesa.

Palabras clave: poshegemonía; hegemonía; alienación; negatividad; Marx; Lenin; Gramsci; Marxismo tradicional; Laclau & Mouffe; Americanismo; Afropesimismo.

Summary: 1. Posthegemony and the Question of Negativity (*The Other Side of the Popular*, 2002). 2. Hegemony, Technique, and the Question of Alienation (*Infrapolitical Passages*, 2020). 3. A Third Thing: Non-Equivalence (2021). References.

Cómo citar: Williams, G. (2022) The *Insistence* that is Posthegemony: Negativity, Technique, and the Question of Alienation. *Res Pública. Revista de Historia de las Ideas Políticas*, 25(3), 391-407. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/rpub.77216>

Thought at work trying to grasp the drama of man, which is the tragedy of alienation,

within the context of the horizon of history and society.

Kostas Axelos, *Alienation, Praxis, and Techne in the Thought of Karl Marx*

Posthegemony provides insight into two intertwined experiential and conceptual registers: **1.** It raises the question of our understanding of epochality. The point of departure for posthegemony is the working realization that even before the advent of neoliberalism in the 1970s the guiding principles and imperatives of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century Left had traversed a historical, and therefore a conceptual, limit and, perhaps, a point of no return¹. Those guiding principles have not disappeared, but the concep-

tual systems that allowed for their formulation in the past, and from which we derived their meaning and our understanding, no longer appear to be viable in the present. The knowledge and consequences of this historical limit explains why posthegemony takes a distance from staking commemorative claims on past utopias, or on the philological revelation of a new and unforeseen proletarian consciousness for the twenty-first century. Posthegemony is not a quest for the recuperation and re-translation of exhausted forms,

* University of Michigan
E-mail: garethw@umich.edu

¹ The passing of this historical limit is the main area of concern for both the form of subaltern studies extended in G. Williams, *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America*, Duke University Press, 2002, and for the question of the infrapolitical elaborated in G. Williams, *Infrapolitical Passages: Global Turmoil, Narco-Accumulation and the Post-Sovereign State*, New York, Forham University Press, 2021. In both works, the question of posthegemony is central.

systems, beliefs, and metaphors. This does not mean, however, that posthegemony allows for a thinking that is unencumbered when it comes to the problem of modern and contemporary historicity. It is just that posthegemony's work comes from a place other than that of defeated or chimeric revelations of Enlightenment consciousness, subjectivist will, or the universalist promise of a yet to be uncovered humanist reconciliation of Man to Nature and Society (the complete re-harmonization of the entire history of the so-called primitive accumulation)². Posthegemony does not keep the faith with modern Revolution or with the Hegelian underpinnings of the proletariat's promised harmonization of Man to Society and Nature in the name of *Spirit*³. Rather, it prefers the positional clarity of the apostate, in the name of the possibility of an inception in thinking (a defection for which Gramsci could not, and for which contemporary Gramscianism cannot, account). 2. Posthegemony is an insistence, and therefore a conceptual accompaniment, that never disappears. It cannot be dialecticized into inexistence. While hegemony—both bourgeois and proletarian—extends a form of social associationism that asserts the moral and intellectual impoverishment of all that remains on or beyond its margins (either via the positivity of a purely metaphysical mechanism such as the extension of the moral conscience of a dominant class or the institutionalization of a specific understanding of “we, the People”), posthegemony points in the direction of the barred or ignored experience; it is a distance-taking from the normative experiences of hegemonic certainty. Posthegemony insists on this not in the name of the apolitical, but in such a way as to move beyond the confinements and enclosures of the political understood as the installation of the techniques of hegemonic will and subjectivism. It is for this reason that posthegemony is invariably ignored by and from within the everyday language, metaphors and behavior that install and derive from hegemony, its moral conscience, and its systems of representation. Posthegemony promises an *other* relation to the political. And it is this *alter* that marks the root, and therefore the radicality, of posthegemony's insistence. It denotes an echoing locus that de-signifies the imaginary realm that under-

lies, and that is ultimately undermined from within, hegemony and the technical normativity of hegemony thinking. For this reason, we can say that posthegemony points in the direction of the infrapolitical uncovering of what hegemony strives to conceal. It does this by signaling the experiential realm and the conceptual moment when hegemony's cards are turned face up on the table, uncovering the fact that in the collective game of politics—in the coalitional game of friends versus enemies—the truth of the imaginary-symbolic order that underlies the political theology of hegemony and its devotional thinking is constitutive of its own repression, and haunting⁴. The very possibility of posthegemony is met invariably with incredulity or condescension because hegemony prioritizes certainty (consciousness) over truth. The sustained political consciousness of hegemony and of hegemony thinking depend for their survival upon domination and the experience of ban. Posthegemony, meanwhile, is the setting aside and invalidating of hegemony's will to power. It offers an opening to an experiential zone that remains *other* to the reason that anchors the imaginary order of the political in certainty, and therefore in the illusory will of the subject alone.

Given its title, it is perhaps natural that for many readers of this volume *posthegemony* is connected primarily to the publication of Jon Beasley-Murray's *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*⁵. However, the question of posthegemony was first thematized extensively in Alberto Moreiras' *The Exhaustion of Difference* and in my *The Other Side of the Popular*⁶. These are three very different books, working in distinct ways around a shared set of concerns and issues regarding globalization and the limitations of “hegemony thinking” for the present. *The Other Side of the Popular* and *The Exhaustion of Difference* came directly out of the 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 the genealogies of Marx-Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida, the postcolonial legacy of South Asian subaltern studies, and psychoanalysis. On the other hand, in

² Consciousness is the basis for every humanism: “«Consciousness» is the not entirely obvious name for *conscientia*, i.e., for *that* knowledge which also knows all modes of comportment of man, insofar as these refer to the *mens*, the «spirit». «Spirit» expresses itself, i.e., itself *as a self*, by saying «I». Insofar as consciousness, as the co-knowing of the known and of its knowing, «is» the relation to the self, it is *self-consciousness*. The essence of consciousness is self-consciousness; every *cogito* is an *ego cogito me cogitare*... Consciousness is not merely *perceptio*, a grasping placing-before [*Vorstellen*], but *apperceptio*, a placing-toward-ourselves that grasps us also” M. Heidegger, *Hegel*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2015, p. 59. Posthegemony offers the critique of the conditions of consciousness's humanist “placing-toward-ourselves that grasps us”.

³ “In Hegel's hands, the whole tradition of Western philosophy from Heraclitus to Kant, the whole tradition of religion from the Jewish prophets to Protestantism, and the whole tradition of history and of art are brought back to life in thought; and Hegel does this with one central concern; to think the being-in-becoming of Totality. Philosophy for Hegel is reflective seizure in consciousness of the universal becoming that leads to divine, absolute *Spirit*. It is a movement that passes through the externalization of Spirit in *Nature* to the understanding of *History* in the concept; for it is in History thus comprehended that *Spirit* returns to itself and grasps itself and by sensory subjectivity, psychological subjectivity, and finally rational subjectivity, in and by law, morality and ethics, art, religion, and philosophy. Philosophy tends toward the transmutation of itself into absolute knowledge of Totality, by spirit; and Totality is truth”. K. Axelos, *Alienation, Praxis, and Techne in the Thought of Karl Marx*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1976, p. 29.

⁴ For further exploration of the infrapolitical, cf. A. Moreiras, *Infrapolítica (manual de uso)*, Madrid, La Oficina, 2020.

⁵ J. Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

⁶ A. Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2001 y G. Williams, *The Other Side of the Popular. Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America*, *op. cit.*

Posthegemony Jon Beasley-Murray sidesteps these genealogies by stating that he is “not content with deconstruction”⁷. He positions deconstruction specifically as the *necessary Other* for his own path into posthegemony, prioritizing *affect*, *habitus* and the *multitude* as so-called “positive” figures for posthegemonic thinking, while also voicing his discomfort with what he calls “the labor of the negative” (setting aside the fact that there can be no mediation or difference in the absence of negativity)⁸. In *Posthegemony* Beasley-Murray assigns negative value to deconstruction yet provides no evaluation of the place of the negative in any conceptual matrix, including his own. In other words, negativity is not a question for the author of *Posthegemony*⁹. Jacques Derrida always posited *deconstruction* as the *necessary Other* of every metaphysics. What anthropocentric, and therefore humanist-metaphysical, thinking does is assign to *deconstruction* the value of the negative against which a positive is then measured, thereby once again reconfirming the need for a never-ending return to Derrida’s entire philosophical trajectory in the name of responsibility and freedom.

But let us not linger on the question of deconstruction per se, for posthegemony should not be reduced to its relation to Jacques Derrida’s signature and trajectory. Rather, let us stick to the fact that there is a line within posthegemonic thinking that evokes the active assumption of responsibility to the promise of freedom from the metaphysical fictions of the merely positive. In this line of thinking, the centrality of the question of negativity in relation to posthegemony cannot be overlooked, even though this is a centrality that Peter Thomas’ 2021 essay on posthegemony, which is the point of departure for this volume and for the editors’ kind invitation for me to contribute to *Res publica*, does not (and, I would suggest, cannot) address. Why, the reader might ask, should this line within posthegemonic thinking not be overlooked? The answer is because it grapples with the historical antinomies, flaws, and inconsistencies of the historical materialist tradition itself, rather than striving merely to circumvent them. It reckons directly, in other words, with the questions of negativity and technique that lie at the heart of our understanding of the modern politics of emancipation and its limitations.

It is well known that Marx turned Hegel on his head, and it is in this overturning that we confront the foundational question of alienation in Marx’s

thought. As Kostas Axelos pointed out over half a century ago in reference to Marx’s relation to Hegel:

Marx sets in motion an immense power of negativity, namely, negativity as it works in historical reality, and at the same time finds the right words for it. But, instead of leading to a synthesis, a negation of negation, in the present moment of time, this negativity results in a dramatic crisis, the historical crisis of the present in which man is found alienated from his true nature, from the products of his own labor, and from world history. And it is not man as the individual who is most of all alienated; it is men, all men. What is alienated is the *humanity* of Mankind. The Marxian view of alienation, as something soon to be transcended, according to the optimistic prospect that Marx is opening up here, forms the horizon of all his philosophic and historical, anthropological and sociological thinking¹⁰.

Modern alienation corresponds to the objectification of being that occurs as a result of the entire history of the so-called primitive (originary) accumulation and the social externalization of abstract wage labor in the fully sovereign regime of bourgeois private property: “Private property and the division of labor render man alien to himself and to the nature of things, to the world and to other men... Private property, the division of labor, capital, and mechanization have allowed man to externalize and realize himself while reifying, unnaturing, and dehumanizing itself. What remains to be done... is to abolish that which alienates men”¹¹. Even Martin Heidegger valued Marx as *the* modern thinker of human estrangement, or alienation:

What Marx recognized in an essential and significant sense, though derived from Hegel, as the estrangement of the human being has its roots in the homelessness of modern human beings. This homelessness is specifically evoked from the destiny of being in the form of metaphysics, and through metaphysics is simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such. Because Marx by experiencing estrangement attains an essential dimension of history, the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts¹².

However, Marx and Heidegger linger on the question of estrangement/alienation in very different ways and with incompatible ends in mind. While for Marx “what remains to be done... is to abolish that which

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁸ J. Rodríguez-Matos (“De lo que agujerea lo Real: Lacan, crítico de la (pos)hegemonía”, *Debats* 128(3), 2015, p. 38) has pointed out that since politics itself is the creation and extension of *habitus*, there appears to be little distance between hegemony and Beasley-Murray’s formulation of posthegemony.

⁹ In accordance with Martin Heidegger, however, it should be remembered that “negativity is swallowed up in positivity only for metaphysical thought... Negativity is questionless both in the system that constitutes the *consummation* of Western metaphysics and in the history of metaphysics in general”. M. Heidegger, *Hegel, op. cit.*, pp. 12-31.

¹⁰ K. Axelos, *Alienation...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 220-222.

¹² M. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, in *idem, Pathmarks*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 248-249.

alienates men”¹³, and this as the only practical precondition for the recuperation and extension of the humanity of the species, for Heidegger what remains to be done is to clear a path toward the deepening of our understanding of being in language, thereby allowing that thinking be claimed by the abyssal, non-metaphysical, experience of estrangement, of negativity, itself¹⁴. Posthegemony thinks in the wake of the conceptual and political incompatibility that the horizon of modern negativity and alienation/estrangement extends. It does this in such a way as to reckon with the consequences and limitations of our political and conceptual legacies for the present.

For the sake of the clarity of my argument, I will merely say that in the last twenty years I have said two things about posthegemony, both of which circle around the question of the relation between negativity and technique, and therefore around the limits of hegemony and of hegemony thinking for our times. These two things can be most clearly explained by detouring briefly through Joseph Arel and Niels Feuerhahn’s introduction to their translation of Martin Heidegger’s *Hegel*, where they observe that for Heidegger “Hegel does not take negativity seriously enough and negativity itself does not become a question for him. To say that negativity is not a question for Hegel means that its origin and essential structure are not treated as questionworthy or questionable and thus remain concealed... Heidegger’s approach in confronting Hegel is thus not to go beyond him but to go back into what he takes to be the concealed ground of his thinking”¹⁵. Drawing explicitly on Arel and Feuerhahn’s insight into the problem that Heidegger identifies at the heart of Hegel, the reader will see that in the pages that follow the two things I have said about posthegemony essentially indicate that hegemony and hegemony thinking in their Leninist, Gramscian and Laclauian formulations, do not take negativity (alienation, estrangement) seriously enough, and that negativity itself is never really a question for hegemony. In fact, hegemony is the sustained closure, in the name of a positive politics, of the question of negativity. To say that negativity is not, and cannot be, a question for hegemony means that its essential structure –the dialectical recuperation, inclusion and representation of subalternity– is not treated as questionworthy or questionable within the history of historical materialism, and that the question of negativity thus remains concealed therein. The politics offered by hegemony is that of the concealment of its own essence and structure, that is, the concealment of that which cannot be recuperat-

ed and dialecticized in the unfolding through time of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The insistence that is posthegemony, however, is an insistence that does not set out to transcend hegemony, or to offer an alternative politics to that which hegemony orients (be that bourgeois or proletarian), but to go back into the concealed ground of hegemony in such a way as to unground, and de-narrativize, hegemony’s calculations, common-sense metaphors, and rationalization of *being*. Posthegemony does this in the name of an inception in thinking that historical materialism deems to be politically unnecessary and inexpedient in the first place. From the position of posthegemony, however, the history of capital in the last five decades should have taught us by now that there is in fact nothing more urgent than *existence* itself. It is for this reason that posthegemony understands subalternity not only as that of the dialectical translation and recuperation of subordinated subject positions, but as the “absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic”¹⁶. The posthegemonic insistence on this limit is the only site for the promise of an inception in thinking at this time.

In the pages that follow I will partially restate for the reader the two things I have already said about posthegemony, including slight modifications in the original texts from *The Other Side of the Popular* (2002) and *Infrapolitical Passages* (2021). This will be carried out in order to move in the direction of a third thing, which is intended as an important, and completely non-translatable, feature of the overall framework that posthegemony has sought to explore in recent decades. This third factor, which is an approach of non-equivalence to the thought of “Afropessimism” in its relation to “the default of the political”, will probably meet with the incredulity of Gramsci’s contemporary devotees because once again it will indicate a moment when the cards of hegemony are turned face up on the table for all to see. It is in this turning that the imaginary-symbolic order of hegemony –that is, the means by which domination is represented and lived as freedom– is obliged to open up to, and to confront, that which cannot be metaphorized or translated into a never-before-seen associationism, or hegemony. I do this in order to delineate an area of concern that remains unaccounted for in Peter Thomas’s understanding of posthegemony, as well as in the pathways that posthegemony itself has taken in the last two decades.

The first section in the pages that follow accounts for the only time Ernesto Laclau made a gesture in the direction of posthegemony by (unintentionally)

¹³ K. Axelos, *Alienation...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-222.

¹⁴ The distinction between determined negation and abyssal negativity is summarized by Heidegger in the following terms: “Hegel’s negativity is not a negativity because it never takes seriously the not and the nihilating, –it has already sublated the not into the «yes»... *The nihilating*: refusal [*Ver-sagen*] of the «ground», *a-byss*” M. Heidegger, *Hegel*, *op. cit.*, p. 37. The insistence that is posthegemony is formulated in its infrapolitical relation to the *a-byss*, as the questioning and de-grounding of the power of the metaphysical determination of subjectivism.

¹⁵ J. Arel and N. Feuerhahn, “Translator’s Introduction”, in M. Heidegger, *Hegel*, *op. cit.*, pp. XII-XIII.

¹⁶ G. Ch. Spivak. “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, en R. Guha and G. Ch. Spivak (ed.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 16.

entering the terrain of Heidegger’s fundamental confrontation with Hegel’s understanding of negativity. I do not mean to suggest that Laclau is Heideggerian at all. What I do wish to point out is a moment in Laclau’s *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* that uncovers a singular void within the overall trajectory of hegemony thinking that should not be overlooked. It signals the *abyss* that is hiding in plain sight in Laclau’s own thinking, in the modern genealogy to which he ascribes, as well as in the forms of hegemony thinking that have been made available to us in the post-Leninist twentieth century. We will return to Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony, and of the sociological technicity of its procedures, later in these pages¹⁷.

1. Posthegemony and the Question of Negativity (*The Other Side of the Popular*, 2002).

In 1990 Ernesto Laclau opened his *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* with the following observation:

Every age adopts an image of itself—a certain horizon, however blurred and imprecise, which somehow unifies its whole experience. The recovery of a past which gave access to the natural order of the world for the Renaissance; the imminence of the advent of Reason for the Enlightenment; the inexorable advance of science for positivism: all were unifying images. In each case, the different stages of what has become known as “modernity” were conceived as moments of transition towards higher forms of consciousness and social organization, holding the promise of a limitless future¹⁸.

In contrast, Laclau continues, the intellectual climate of recent decades has been dominated by the growing and generalized awareness of limits. This awareness challenges not only the notion and possibility of unifying images but also the sustainability of the idea of successive stages within a process of historical development:

Firstly, limits of reason, as has been pointed out from very different intellectual quarters—from epistemology and the philosophy of science to post-analytical philosophy, pragmatism, phenomenology and post-structuralism. Secondly, limits, or rather slow erosion of the values and ideals of radical transformation, which had given meaning to the political experience of successive generations. And finally, limits arising from

the crisis of the very notion of “cultural vanguard” which marked the different moments and stages of modernity¹⁹.

Laclau concludes this opening section of *New Reflections* by affirming that after decades, or perhaps even centuries, of announcing the arrival of the new, it is as if we had reached a point of exhaustion and now mistrusted the outcome of all forms of experimentation²⁰. The unifying image of our time, in other words, is that of the exhaustion of all inherited unifying images. Thus, and as Laclau points out, “the novelty of the present situation... lies in the fact that the nodal point around which the intelligibility of the social is articulated does not now tend to be displaced from one instance to another, but to dissolve”²¹. Contemporary reflection is conditioned by a potentially productive circularity. Although it is always unsatisfactory to reflect on the present using exhausted notions of historical ground and becoming, our critical languages remain inevitably indebted to the history of exhaustion’s coming into being. After all, “the being of what we are is first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not. And... as Hölderlin said so well, we can only bear witness to it. To bear witness would be to bear witness to what we are insofar as we inherit, and that—here is the circle, here is the chance, or the finitude—we inherit the very thing that allows us to bear witness to it”²². The dilemma for Laclau in 1990 is that the intensification of globalism—the exhaustion of the possibility of a national fictive ethnicity brought about by the crisis of national capitalism’s uneven and incomplete organizational structures and modes of representation—has exposed us, in extremely violent fashion, to the fact that while certain imperatives persist (freedom, justice, community, for example) the conceptual systems from which these imperatives have drawn their meaning in the past no longer appear to be viable. As such, bearing witness to exhaustion is the condition of possibility for sustained reflection in the present, and is therefore more necessary than ever. However, it is also an increasingly thorny venture. Bearing witness to history and to historical meaning in terms that remain (or that wish to remain) faithful to that modern inheritance merely reproduces the contemporary dilemma by situating critical reason once again on the side of real or imminent exhaustion. As a result, the inheritance of exhaustion marks both the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of all contemporary reflection.

Exhaustion traces (yet, curiously, fails to inaugurate) the ultimate demise of modernity’s (predomi-

¹⁷ Thomas’s *Gramscianism* prefers to occlude Laclau’s entire legacy in order to emphasize the Leninist terrain of the modern communist party-form in Gramsci, which was the very tradition that Laclau proposed to renovate from the 1980s onward. Posthegemony remains unaffected by this doctrinal occlusion.

¹⁸ E. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, New York, Verso, 1990, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Idem*.

²⁰ *Idem*.

²¹ *Idem*.

²² J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 54.

nantly national) histories. As Laclau puts it, it signals the end of a certain (Hegelian) conceptualization of history, understood as the historical unfolding of a permanent transition toward higher forms of consciousness and more advanced forms of collective political and social organization. But the end of that history of (predominantly) national modernization and progress is not the end of thought. Neither is it the demise of historicity. Contemporary exhaustion signals the end of a particular notion of history that sutured it (often implicitly and, of course, over-simplistically) to the promise of a limitless future. But the end of this conceptualization of history is neither cataclysmic nor apocalyptic. It is not revelatory either. Rather, it brings into view the subtraction of modernity's developmentalist sense of history from the regimes of signification that are available to us today. Subtraction, in other words, gives us the nihilistic gift of exhaustion, as the weakening of "a composed and complete order (from) within which to find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation"²³. Thus, the contemporary is the weakening, unworking, and redistribution of modern capitalist history's (that is, the nation-state's) modernizing ground. This is our inheritance and, according to Derrida, our chance ("here is the circle, here is the chance, or the finitude")²⁴.

At first glance, Laclau's observations from the late 1980s seek to challenge the foundational premises of the Hegelian philosophical system (at least as they were translated into classical Marxism). Indeed, Laclau both bears witness to, and displaces, the underpinning of the notion of the universal in its relation to the geographic boundaries and interactions of the capitalist world economy and, in particular, in its relation to the nation-state form which by the mid-1960s had become the dominant form of social organization almost throughout the globe. In increasingly postnational times, however, the Hegelian conception of social objectivity and contradiction (in which the history of the nation is considered to be the history of the dialectical unfolding of higher and higher forms of social organization) have been quite literally opened up and dispersed –exposed to their finitude– by the radically contingent nature of global capital. In the words of Laclau:

The Hegelian notion of negativity is that of a necessary negativity and as such was conceived as determinate negation. That is to say that the negative is a moment in the internal unfolding of the concept which is destined to be reabsorbed in the *Aufhebung*, or higher unity. It is not even necessary here, as has been occasionally claimed, for the final term of the dialectical movement to be positive; even if the system is conceived as a successive movement between positivity

and negativity, the latter is always internal to it. Contingency itself is absorbed as a moment in the self-unfolding of the necessary²⁵.

The extension of Hegelian negativity occupies the same terrain as Marx's understanding of social antagonism. Determined negativity sheds light on the repeated and sustained outside-inside dialectic of recuperation that characterizes, for example, class antagonism, institutionalized center-periphery positionalities, neo-orientalist intellectual recuperations, and state-region relations during the modern phase of national development. Indeed, it was from within this dialectic that the notion of totality –the concept of (and desire for) the universalizing function of the nation, for example, as the privileged terrain for social organization and for cultural and political thought– could be sustained and imposed by the bourgeoisie as a process unfolding itself almost as a natural law (and most certainly as a moral imperative both on the Left and Right) within the developmentalist transition toward higher forms of individual and collective consciousness and of national social organization.

Laclau, however, provides added nuance to the question and place of negativity within the contemporary constitution of the social, as well as within the distinction between this and the political. Laclau recognizes and thinks through his debt to the Hegelian dialectic. However, he opens up that essentially determined dialectic to possibilities that are consonant with the collapse of modern epochality, the weakening of the underlying ground of the nation and the increasingly emergent contingencies of globalization. In other words, he attempts to think about the place of negativity from within the exhaustion of modernity's nodal points of intelligibility (the nation-state, national culture, national identity, etc.) as well as from within the apparent exhaustion of the Hegelian philosophical system itself. The internal unfolding within the national terrain of, for example, people/power bloc antagonisms or periods of struggle over the means by which to stabilize particular social or cultural contents, or the development of struggles over the means by which to fix meaning around particular discursive nodal points, do not represent true outsides, since they are mobilized in the first place in order to be recuperated by the contesting ideologies of nation formation. As such, they merely make themselves present in order to be recovered by the inside (the nation) under the banner of national hegemony. Social contents such as those emerging from a national people/power bloc antagonism allow for the social sphere to "be regarded as a trench war in which different political projects strive to articulate a greater number of social signifiers around themselves"²⁶. In other words, the national people/power bloc an-

²³ J.-L. Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 4

²⁴ J. Derrida, *Specters ...*, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁵ E. Laclau, *New reflections ...*, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 28

tagonism allows for the potentially universalizing articulation and representation of distinct outsides in the name of hegemony construction, nation-state formation, and national identity consolidation.

However, since hegemony is always constructed on the successful concealment of the exclusions on which it is grounded, the expanded articulation of social signifiers around the unifying image of, say, the nation-state also strives to exorcise society of its potential non-normative and unacceptable practices. Processes of hegemonization operate on the historical and social terrains in such a way as to allow for, to extend, and to perpetuate social coherence as the necessary active forgetting of dislocation and difference. In this sense, these processes labor actively against the possibility of alternative (nonnormative) “worldings” that remain heterogeneous to those already represented within, and articulated by, hegemony’s universalizing repertoires and recuperations. As Laclau states:

Insofar as an act of institution has been successful, a “forgetting of the origins” tends to occur; the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade. In this way, the institution tends to assume the form of a mere objective presence. This is the moment of sedimentation. It is important to realize that this fading entails a concealment. If objectivity is based on exclusion, the traces of that exclusion will always somehow be present. What happens is that the sedimentation can be so complete, the influence of one of the dichotomous relationships’ poles so strong, that the contingent nature of that influence, its original dimension of power, do not prove immediately visible²⁷.

Determined negation allows for the expansion and deepening of social intelligibility, translatability, appropriation, morality and knowability (the fabrication of specific chains of representational equivalence, in other words) within the boundaries of any given field of force. As such, it always operates as both a potentializing force and as an active cover-up and silencing of those heterogeneous realms that expose (from within) the empirical impossibility, or the violence, of its language. As such, and as Derrida indicates, hegemony’s active forgetting of its exclusions is never complete, for “hegemony... organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony”²⁸.

Posthegemony is in fact the thinking of that haunting. It is the inherent incompleteness of hegemony, rather than the full realization of its internal rationales, that brings Laclau back to the question of negativity in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. As has already been noted, in the Hegelian operation negativity is the determined negativity and contin-

gent objectivity whose potential recovery is constitutive of an internal structure. Negativity is, then, a form of outsidedness the recovery of which upholds hegemony’s signifying processes, representations, and unifying images while remaining ultimately sedimented within, and constitutive of, the dialectical unfolding of the field of hegemonic social intelligibility itself. Dialectical negativity extends an outside to its own structure of signification that nevertheless allows the system from which it distinguishes itself to complete itself and, thereby, to achieve an image of closure. In other words, it conjures up a limit as a necessary resistance to itself, recuperates that limit, and labors always against any possible death of signification that might arise from the limit that it conjures up. Dialectics therefore places itself on the side of the constitution and maintenance of production and knowability, as an incessant labor against the possibility of intelligibility’s breakdown and collapse. In Gramsci this constitutive outside is denoted as the place and historical role of the “subaltern classes”.

In *New Reflections*, however, Laclau points toward the contours of a negativity that is capable of not being recovered, of not being put to work in the name of hegemonic reproduction and, for that matter, of not being reabsorbed or sublated in a community’s utopic drive toward higher forms of self-consciousness and of social organization. Laclau asserts the possibility of an abyssal negativity that exposes the radically contingent nature of all social objectivity by suspending hegemony’s signifying processes and its necessary destitutions. This, then, is a radically dislocating negativity; a negativity that is so negative that it is capable of uncovering the fact that Hegel’s understanding of negativity is not negative enough. Momentarily appearing to echo Heidegger’s confrontation with Hegel, Laclau signals a destituted and destituting negativity that labors on the side of absolute impropriety, estrangement, and the abyss, rather than on the side of the passage toward higher forms of consciousness and social organization. As Laclau indicates:

If the negativity of which we are speaking reveals the contingent nature of all objectivity, if it is truly constitutive, then it cannot be recovered through any *Aufhebung*. It is something which simply shows the limits of the constitution of objectivity and cannot be dialecticized²⁹.

How can we characterize the negativity that Laclau seems to evoke as an abyss that is potentially constitutive of an alternative –abyssal– relation to politics? Perhaps we could say that it signals a posthegemonic non-site; a non-place within the social field in which hegemonic articulations and signifying processes no longer work, in which hegemonic

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

²⁸ J. Derrida, *Specters...*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

²⁹ E. Laclau, *New reflections...*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

discourses and their metaphors cease to make sense. Such a non-site would appear to come into view not so much in the incorporation of subalternity as an inferior position within a hegemonic articulation but, rather, in the opening-up of the political field to the “absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic”³⁰. It denotes an estrangement that is so radically alien to hegemony and to hegemonic thought that it both suspends the metaphoricity of the social field (by signifying the impossible universalization of particularities) and, at the same time, opens up that field to the knowledge that in knowledge there is an *other* thought that is not thought by the metaphors of hegemony. This thought thinks and measures hegemony’s force; it exists in the absence of appropriation as it un-works hegemony’s signifying processes; and it does not coincide with hegemony even when it converges with it. This is, in other words, the opening up of thought (and, in particular, of thought’s institutional investments in the securing of hegemonic rationales) to the exposure to alterity, and therefore to the opening up of reflection to an outside that is capable of signaling the possibility of a differential telos for thinking/acting (that is, of a radical a-topic place when viewed from within the optic of hegemony). It is the affirmation of this *other* thought within thought –this disjunctive, interruptive, and heterogeneous remainder to, and within, hegemonic reflection– that brings forth the finitude of hegemony, that un-covers “the infamous death that is the beginning of the mind”³¹, and that extends what Derrida has called the formal structure of promise: the persistence of a spectral site of untranslatability within thought, and within the social field, that remains irreducible to any hegemonic recovery or deconstruction, and that therefore upholds the contours of both sustained reflection and of emancipatory promise. It is the abyssal finitude of hegemony at which all politics (and all political reflection) both stops and (potentially) re-begins *as the existential infrapolitical other to the political*.

This was the first and last time Ernesto Laclau turned hegemony’s cards face up on the table for all to see as a technique of domination based on the structural determinations of dialectical recuperation and exclusion. Never again would Laclau’s thinking suggest the contours of a negativity beyond and other –that is, infinitely more negative– than the determined negativity of the Hegelian dialectic, despite his claims for the non-Hegelian telos of his own thinking. Having said that, what remained in the wake of Laclau’s perhaps unintentional signaling of a negativity more

negative than that of the logics of hegemony, was the possibility of a preliminary approach to posthegemonic negativity (to a reckoning with a negativity more negative than the sociological inheritance of the historical materialist understanding); with a negativity, that is, that moves in a direction other than that of the determined negation of the dialectic of consciousness (*Spirit*), and therefore of the ever-expanding progress toward subjectivity’s masterful, universalist grasp of Totality.

In what follows, we will continue our approach to the question of posthegemony by focusing on the relation between hegemony and technique in Gramsci, as outlined recently in *Infrapolitical Passages*. This re-presentation will then allow us to address in greater detail the question of the relation between hegemony, technique, and alienation/estrangement in Gramsci, together with their significance for thinking from within a posthegemonic positionality.

2. Hegemony, Technique, and the Question of Alienation (*Infrapolitical Passages*, 2020)

In the wake of the Bolshevik experience and of the “passive revolution” of the Italian Risorgimento which determined Gramsci’s recuperation and development of the concept of *hegemony*, in the mid 1970s Christine Buci-Glucksmann called attention to the ways in which hegemony’s anomic/nomic duality played itself out in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*. Central to this process was Gramsci’s complementing of Lenin’s *gegemoniya* with the formulation of the “hegemonic apparatus”, in such a way as to explain the internal processes of the Italian experience, and of the bourgeois passive revolution in particular. There is in Gramsci, Buci-Glucksmann observed, a “double process of shift and enrichment from the hegemony of the proletariat to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, from the constitution of a class to the problematic of the state”³². This double process of shift and enrichment plays itself out in different ways in the course of the *Prison Notebooks*, in such a way that the concept of hegemony undergoes a transformation in its relation to prior uses. Buci-Glucksmann explains in the following terms: “Up until 1926 hegemony was chiefly used to mean an alternative strategy for the proletariat”³³. In *Notebook I*, for example, the concepts of hegemony and of hegemonic apparatus are not linked directly to the problematic of the bourgeois state, but rather to that of dual power and class constitution in a process of revolutionary change. In later *Notebooks* (7 and 8), however, hegemony gradually extends to cover the structures of the bourgeois state³⁴. As such, the Leninist derivation in reference

³⁰ G. Ch. Spivak, “Subaltern studies...”, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

³¹ M. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 35.

³² Ch. Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1980, p. 47.

³³ *Idem*.

³⁴ *Idem*.

to hegemonic anomie shifts, as Gramsci begins to explore the “apparatus of hegemony” in reference to the bourgeois mediations of class via the educational apparatus, the cultural apparatus (intellectuals, literature, museums, libraries, etc.), the organization of information, the everyday environment, town planning, and the influence of apparatuses inherited from an earlier mode of production such as the Church and its representatives among the intelligentsia³⁵. Gramsci uncovers that hegemony is not only an explanation of that which is heterogeneous and resistant to the constituted power of the bourgeoisie –the incommensurable experience of Lenin’s *gegemoniya*, or the means toward the dictatorship of the proletariat– but that it is also a function of the institutional mediations and calculations of specifically bourgeois state legislative consciousness, in which the “hegemonic apparatus” suppresses the experience of *gegemoniya* by translating it into the language and mediations of the bourgeois forms of the integral nation state.

Hegemony in this sense uncovers a sociological reason and politics that stands for both the enabling and the refutation of the singularity of the event, depending on whether it is mobilized in the hands of the revolutionary proletariat or in the hands of the bourgeoisie. As a result of this dialectical drama –or this always incomplete and never fully successful demand for the sublation of anomie– the thought of hegemony always upholds a constitutive yet contradictory relation between extension and crisis, most likely haunted by the example of the Jacobinism-Bonapartism relation in post-Revolutionary France, in which the crisis of hegemony is born of hegemony itself:

Any use of a model of integration also requires a model of disintegration, Gramsci’s theoretical and methodological couples being bipolar. No theory of hegemony, in other words, without a theory of the crisis of hegemony (or organic crisis); no analysis of the integration of subaltern classes to a dominant class without a theory of the modes of autonomization and constitution of classes that enable a formerly subaltern class to become hegemonic³⁶.

The logical consequence of this is that the “more authentically hegemonic a class really is, the more it leaves opposing classes the possibility of organizing and forming themselves into an autonomous political force... The concept of hegemony, therefore, is not exempt from a theoretical ambiguity of its own”³⁷. This latter insight is largely overlooked, in active concealment of the fact that hegemony can be both a principal (Promethean) function that belongs inter-

nally to the unfolding of the revolutionary event, but also a turn against itself via, for example, the bourgeois passive revolution. But from a posthegemonic perspective the question of the metaphorization of this dialectic bipolarity between hegemony and hegemony is worth dwelling on.

Peter Thomas insists that despite Gramsci’s detailed engagement with the hegemony of the bourgeois passive revolution, what he was really interested in was hegemony in its Leninist form, as the form of class leadership capable of directing society toward proletarian revolution. Against the institutions of bourgeois hegemony, pedagogy and consciousness-building could produce, Gramsci insisted and hoped, the social conditions and the cultural moment apt for the leadership and domination exercised in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat³⁸. From the perspective of posthegemony, however, what is truly at stake is the relation that both modalities of hegemony (bourgeois and proletarian) maintain with the question of modern human alienation, which is, after all, the great dilemma that Marx set out to *de-alienate* in the name of *communism* (as the final resolution for the entire history of primitive accumulation and its violence). Presumably, the passive revolution dwells on the side of modern alienation while Leninist *gegemoniya* sits on the side of communist de-alienation. However, both forms of hegemony, while exercised by antagonistic social groupings, still have something fundamental in common: as Buci-Glucksmann points out, the more authentically hegemonic hegemony is, the more open to counter-hegemonic theoretical and practical challenges it becomes, since its coercive frameworks become more embedded, sedimented, and naturalized as the common sense of society. As a result, those same coercive frameworks become more open over time to the emergence of ‘arbitrary’ aims, energies, and forms of questioning. This problem presents itself on both sides of the class formation of hegemony. Accomplished hegemony is born either from within the potentiality of an event (the proletarian leadership of the revolution) or from within the socialization and institutionalization of a bourgeois moral economy (“passive revolution”). But no matter what its origin, hegemony is only ever the force of restraint against the appearance of its own phantasm. The place of the subaltern, and, indeed, of the subject, is only ever *under* the historical law of Revolution or of the bourgeois integral nation-state, and therefore *under* the law of the ontology of modern sovereignty itself.

Peter Thomas’s *The Gramscian Moment* places political logic –including the revolutionary logic of

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 57-58.

³⁸ Hegemony in Gramsci is by definition a pedagogical relation extended in preparation for the arrival of the right “cultural moment”, which is the unitary expression of a communion of wills sharing the same world picture: “Cada acto histórico no puede ser realizado sino por el «hombre colectivo», o sea que presupone el agrupamiento de una unidad «cultural social», por la que una multiplicidad de voluntades disgregadas, con heterogeneidad de fines, se funden para un mismo fin, sobre la base de una concepción (igual) y común del mundo”. A. Gramsci, *Cuadernos de la cárcel*, Edición a cargo de Valentino Gerratana, vol. 4, México, Ediciones Era, 2000, p. 209 [Q10, #44].

Leninist *gegemoniya*— on the side of the authority of practical rule. And it is here—in the authority of practical rule—that both proletarian and bourgeois hegemonies are conjoined in their differential relations to the question of alienation, which was extended by, and yet left unresolved in, Marx, as well as in the entire history of historical materialism. It is this latter question—and, in particular, the intuition that herein something important emerges in hegemony’s doctrinal relation to the supposed de-alienation (re-harmonization, reconciliation) of alienation in proletarian revolution—that posthegemony’s overall area of concern resides. Hegemony reflects different manifestations of the same will for the authority of practical rule in two distinct forms. But the will to power still reigns supreme across the entire spectrum of praxis and regime change.

There is a significant yet passing moment in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* that we can opt to take seriously, or, if we were to proceed like faithful neo-Gramscians, merely accept as a sociological fact or necessity. The moment in question comes to light in the 4th Notebook #38, “Relations between Structure and Superstructures”³⁹. Here Gramsci addresses what he refers to as “the crucial problem of historical materialism” (as such, presumably this section addresses both bourgeois hegemony as well as that of its Leninist derivation). The crucial problem that Gramsci wishes to highlight refers to the question of how to address the way in which methodological criteria acquire their full significance in the analysis of concrete historical case studies such as the French Revolution or the Italian Risorgimento. (Jacobinism or no Jacobinism, that [presumably] is the question for the future revolution). Gramsci concludes this section by observing that the question of methodology and historical specificity must be “conducted within the ambit of the concept of hegemony”⁴⁰. Presumably, then, it is to be conducted within the ambit of the concept of hegemony when led by the proletariat, but by now we know that it can also be overtaken by the bourgeoisie, as indeed the French example teaches.

Herein Gramsci provides us with two figurations of hegemony and, moreover, with two sizeable historical and conceptual limitations. The first conceptualization refers to hegemony as the formation and universalization of a sense of economic, political, intellectual and moral unity in the relation between one “fundamental social group” and other subordinate groups. Logically speaking, then, it can apply to the leadership of the proletariat in the hegemony of a revolutionary historical sequence, and also to the bourgeois institutions of the passive revolution. In both cases, hegemony is the modern social formalization of the One. Gramsci proceeds, however, by

signaling, and by skimming over, one absolutely crucial limit to the concept of hegemony itself:

The state-government is seen as a group’s own organism for creating the favorable terrain for the maximum expansion of the group itself. But this development and this expansion are also viewed concretely as universal; that is, they are viewed as being tied to the interests of the subordinate groups, as a development of unstable equilibriums between the interests of fundamental groups and the interests of the subordinate groups in which *the interests of the fundamental group prevail—but only up to a certain point; that is, without going quite as far as corporate economic selfishness*⁴¹.

Corporate economic selfishness is not only antithetical to the inner workings and extension of hegemony; it destroys it. This is the case presumably because, in Aristotelian terms, it would extend the victory of the appetites over “reason without appetites”, and a social life governed by the automatism of the drives over reason. In this formulation hegemony is the constant technical application of a certain point that should never be transcended or undermined.

The second conceptualization worthy of emphasis reads as follows, as Gramsci returns to that “certain point” at which hegemony ceases to be hegemonic. Now, however, he considers that point specifically from the side of the subordinate groups:

The fact of hegemony presupposes that *the interests and tendencies of those groups over whom hegemony is exercised have been taken into account* and that *a certain equilibrium* is established. It presupposes, in other words, that the hegemonic group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind; these sacrifices, however, cannot touch the essential; since hegemony is political but also and above all economic, it has its material base in the decisive function exercised by the hegemonic group in the decisive core of economic activity⁴².

Here Gramsci emphasizes that in order for hegemony to be hegemonic, the subordinated groups should feel that their specifically economic interests are being represented by the state-government. For Gramsci, hegemony is the political representation of good intentions towards subordinate groups whose “interests and tendencies”, whatever they might be, should be “taken into account” by the “fundamental social group”—but *not too much and not too little*—while the economic interests of that fundamental group must prevail at all times, but *only up to a certain point*.

Hegemony for Gramsci, and presumably this refers to proletarian hegemony as much as bourgeois hegemony, is a question of reason and technique; it

³⁹ A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg, vol. 2., New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. 177-188.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 180, italics mine.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 183, italics mine.

is a practical economization of a force of restraint against the abyss of irreducible disorder or turmoil that would exist equally on both sides of the equation conjoining the fundamental and subordinate groups. It is the never-ending calculation and balancing act between means and ends, involving the virtuous politics of restraint and immunization against “corporate economic selfishness”, and against disequilibrium, which could probably be understood as the potential demise of equivalence, or imminent turmoil. As a result, hegemony is the constant maximization of the active subsumption of the everyday under specific laws of comportment. *Corporate economic selfishness* is what lies on the conjectural “other side” of that *certain point* at which the terrain of hegemony—the hegemonic balancing act—confronts its limit. Similarly, tumult, or in fact any kind of perceived or declared arbitrariness of any kind, challenges or perhaps even destroys hegemony.

What can be gathered from this passage is that, ontologically speaking, for proletarian hegemony the “crucial problem of historical materialism” is essentially pastoral in nature. It is the never-ending determination of the proper steering of all human action and morality toward the political techniques of socio-political containment and guidance from above. It is the constant determination and instrumentalization of the proper character of modern domination, which is perceived to be better than the appearance of open tyranny. By definition, hegemony is the reduction of human experience to the realm and domination of instrumental reason and technique. The real—understood as all those aspects of human life that are not immediately subject to the *ratio* of hegemo-

ny—remains beyond measure, in the an-archic realm of potential or actual tumult. The real for hegemony would be the threatening realm of politics in retreat, or that of an infra-excess of hegemony that could not be recuperated, dialecticized and enforced⁴³. For hegemony there is nothing worse than a negativity that is so negative that it cannot be recuperated, translated, and rendered productive. As such, “the crucial problem of historical materialism” is both the application of the techniques of instrumental reason and the fact that hegemony is never historically or materially sufficient to account for what remains beyond its constitutive reductionism, beyond the common sense of its *ratio*, or beyond the underlying Christianity of its pastoral power⁴⁴.

From the critical position of posthegemony, the question of negativity—and therefore the question of estrangement, alienation, un-homeliness, and non-dwelling—lies at the heart of hegemony’s relation to technique and reason. This question haunts both sides of hegemony’s distinct modalities (bourgeois vs proletarian). For Marx, of course, the alienation installed by the bourgeois mode of production—the alienation that stems from the modern objectification of the human via the social externalization of individual and collective labor in the fully sovereign regime of private property—exists on two levels simultaneously: on one hand, it is fundamentally *real*, *actual* and *material* (that is, economic). On the other, it is *ideological*, *superstructural* and *epiphenomenal*⁴⁵. Thanks to the history of the so-called primi-

⁴³ I take the term “infra-excess” from A. Moreiras, “Infrapolítica y política de la infrapolítica”, *Debats*, 128, n° 3, 2015, p. 56.

⁴⁴ In one of his pre-prison writings titled “The Communist Party”, Gramsci defined the subject of communist revolution as a humanist secularization of Christian faith: “The Communist Party is the only institution that may be seriously compared with the religious communities of primitive Christianity... one can hazard a comparison and establish a scale of criteria for judging between the militants for the City of God and the militants for the City of Man” A. Gramsci, *Pre-Prison Writings* (ed. Richard Bellamy), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 189-190. In the tenth *Prison Notebook*, from over a decade later, Gramsci explores this line of thinking in the context of the question “What is Man?” in his relation to nature and society: “Los católicos dirán que ninguna otra concepción es seguida puntualmente, y tienen razón, pero esto solamente demuestra que no existe de hecho, históricamente, un modo de concebir y actuar igual para todos los hombres y nada más; no tienen ninguna razón favorable al catolicismo, si bien este modo de pensar y actuar desde hace siglos está organizado para este fin, lo que aún no ha sucedido para ninguna otra religión con los mismos medios, con el mismo espíritu de sistema, con la misma continuidad y centralización. Desde el punto de vista «filosófico» lo que no satisface en el catolicismo es el hecho de que éste, a pesar de todo, pone la causa del mal en el hombre y el individuo mismo, o sea concibe al hombre como individuo bien definido y limitado... Hay que elaborar una doctrina en la que todas estas relaciones sean activas y estén en movimiento, estableciendo muy claramente que la sede de estas actividades es la conciencia del hombre individual” A. Gramsci, *Cuadernos...*, vol. 4, *op. cit.* pp. 220-222 [Q10, #54]. If we take seriously Gramsci’s insight that “every historical phenomenon... must be studied for its own peculiar characteristics, in the context of contemporary realities” A. Gramsci, *Pre-Prison...*, *op. cit.*, p. 188 [“The Communist Party”]—then the understanding of communist emancipation uncovered in Gramsci’s early and prison writings, as a relation between means and ends, uncovers the *logocentrism* of European humanity in its ultimate civilizational form as a planetary [political-theological] counter—metaphysics; a counter-Spirit of absolute consciousness. What form does the end—the dictatorship of the proletariat—take? What is the world picture, or *Weltanschauung*, in Gramsci? He is very clear. In “The Factory Worker” (*ibidem*, pp. 151-154) Gramsci embraces the image of the integral and unitary conception of the world as factory: “The proletariat cannot live without working and without working in an orderly, methodical way. The division of labor has unified the proletarian class psychologically... the more he feels the needs for order, method, precision; the more he feels the need for the whole world to become like a vast factory, organized with the same precision and method and order which he recognizes as vital in the factory... projected out into [a] system of relation that links one factory to another, one city to another, one nation to another... it is only the working class now which retains a real love for labor and the machine” (*ibidem*, pp. 152-153). This real love for labor and the machine is most likely the origin of Gramsci’s interest in “Americanism”. The dictatorship of the proletariat extends the planetarization, the very Westernization itself, of European humanity (*logos*, *techné*, *machinism*, *productionism*). It is what Heidegger would refer to as a confrontation internal to *techné*, for mastery over planetary reason and calculation. The planetary rationalization of existence, however, is akin to “emancipation” in Gramsci, and European humanity becomes “the whole world” as a counter type to the bourgeois mode of production, thereby raising the question of what constitutes a new beginning. One must wonder how the whole world can be a counter type, and how a counter type can emancipate. Gramscianism has nothing to say about this question. The insufficiency of a counter-metaphysics of the Left now, however, is the very point of departure for posthegemony.

⁴⁵ K. Axelos, *Alienation...*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

tive accumulation, humanity in the bourgeois mode of production is absolutely estranged from itself, and from its possible future self, in both body and mind, individually and collectively, socially, and conceptually.

As already pointed out, hegemony in Gramsci also has a double nature. On one hand, it is the anchor and guarantee of real, actual, material, ideological, superstructural and epiphenomenal alienation via the hegemony—the everyday alienation-making—of the beliefs and institutions of private property, of the modern nation-state and of civil society (that is, the historical form and development of the passive revolution). Therefore, we can presume that for Gramsci, as a Marxist-Leninist, bourgeois hegemony is alienated consciousness in practice and in everyday institutional and lived experience. If, as already stated, alienation in Marx has a double nature (*real, actual* and *material, and ideological, superstructural and epiphenomenal*), then the complete overthrow of the two dimensions of modern alienation would demand a fully de-alienated and de-alienating (that is, a full and simultaneous de-objectifying and a fully re-subjectifying) praxis, or absolute re-humanization of humanity, capable of abolishing definitively all prior forms of expropriation and alienation. Such would be the purpose and technique of Leninist *gegemoniya*, understood as radical de-alienation-making in practice. The question, though, is whether the constant technical management of the *certain point* signaled by Gramsci in *Notebook 4* would in fact constitute the actual de-alienation of the human. There is no reason to think so.

From the position of posthegemony, the problem in the relation between bourgeois hegemony and proletarian hegemony (that is, in the political problem of a single signifier encapsulating both alienation-making and de-alienation-making, depending on what social grouping mobilizes it), is two-fold, and, I would add, is irresolvable in the terms laid out by both Gramsci and, indeed, by Gramscianism, for we cannot overlook the fact that whereas the question of alienation, and therefore of negativity, lies at the heart of Marx's diagnosis of the entire bourgeois mode of production, Gramsci himself has very little to say about the matter. The structural and fully operative occlusion around the problem of alienation in

Gramsci leads us to another question: Is hegemony in both its proletarian/bourgeois modalities designed to grasp the negativity of alienation in all its illusory dynamics, in such a way as to cast it definitively into oblivion in the name of the true? Or does it not actually grasp alienation at all and merely re-signify and redistribute it?

It is certainly true that the conditions of alienation—as the alienation of labor in a system of bourgeois private property—are elucidated by Gramsci via the state-civil society and cultural/intellectual functions of the capitalist mode of production and its institutions. However, hegemony as proletarian *de-alienation*—which is, after all, the modality that Peter Thomas signals as the center, and ultimate goal, of the entire Gramscian critical apparatus—is largely absent in the *Prison Notebooks*, existing only ever as a constitutive article of faith transferred onto signifiers such as *pedagogy, consciousness* and national-popular *culture*⁴⁶. These signifiers stand, in all their certainty, for the replacement, reharmonization and reconciliation—the de-alienation—of alienation, but at no point do they grapple with alienation itself. They stand-in or substitute for *de-alienation* (again, *presumably*) as the sole means by which ideological alienation can be reoriented in the direction of a fully de-alienated experience of the actual, the true, and the real. But they are not words that shed any light on the abolition of alienation itself, or on the demise of on-going primitive accumulation. Indeed, the fully consummated, fully de-alienated consciousness of reconciliation between man, society, and nature (which is the end goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat) would surely still depend for its existence—indeed, for its very language—on the domination of a de-alienated *superstructural* domain. Is a fully de-alienated and de-alienating superstructure conceivable in the *Notebooks*? Or is such a thing more an article of faith that we are supposed to believe in?⁴⁷

This leads us to another set of questions: Does hegemony, on both sides of the proletarian/bourgeois divide, do anything other than manage the repression—the alienation—that it inherits? How does something other than alienation come into being via the extension of a common sense of absolute reconciliation predicated ceaselessly from the superstruc-

⁴⁶ Gramsci is a thinker of humanity's movement in the historical direction of absolute consciousness as freedom (Spirit). Gramsci proposes to dialecticize bourgeois individualism via a pedagogy of proletarian consciousness, but the *Notebooks* themselves do not accomplish that task via any specific theory of knowledge. Nowhere is the primacy of the total communist state doubted, but the means do not point methodologically in the direction of the end. It is faith in absolute spirit turned on its head, in the form of the communist party-state as ideal.

⁴⁷ While Gramsci is an acute commentator of current affairs, philosophically he tends to put the cart (of Absolute Spirit, that is, the coming into being of the revolutionary dialectic of consciousness) before the horse (of historicity, or of analytic method). He does this in the name of objective commentary, knowledge, and therefore science. Socialist history remains internal to the dialectical relation between knowledge and Spirit. It is this enclosure and presupposition that establishes the "actuality" of the ground of his thinking, and also the idea that socialism, or communism, raises political thinking to the level of science. *Absolute Spirit* is the presupposition and structuring principle of Gramsci's understanding of the entirety of Enlightenment history and of the coming politics. Gramsci, like Hegel before him, and, indeed, like Marx to an extent, had already decided in what direction history *should be* flowing and why, with "Spirit" as the shape of the new era. It is this temporal question alone—between the claim to method and having decided on a prior conclusion regarding finality—that informs Gramsci's understanding of a socialist epoch, or of the interregnum. While the proletariat is the determined negation of the bourgeoisie, the dialectical passage by which the proletariat ceases to be merely a negation of the bourgeoisie and becomes entirely Other is never really elucidated, other than by claiming the absolute reconciliation of the State-society relation at some point in the proletarian overtaking of the State, and the full achievement of future consciousness guided fully by Party militancy.

tural pulpits of the fully enlightened intellectuals of the Party? This much is not clear, perhaps because alienation itself remains essentially languageless in Gramsci's thinking. How do we know, via Gramsci's *Notebooks*, that Leninist hegemony would be utterly alien to the ideological and existential alienation that props up bourgeois hegemony? Gramsci tells us that hegemony is a "reform of consciousness and of the methods of knowledge, it is a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact"⁴⁸. For this reason, we are expected to have faith in the Party consciousness to always know what is best for everyone. But does Leninist *gegemoniya* in Gramsci give specific content to, or guarantee, the de-alienation of modern knowledge and philosophy? Does it guarantee communist freedom from the experience of the alienation of labor? Surely the lack of any such guarantee is one of the most painful and unresolved lessons from the history of the entire post-1917 period.

Gramscianism, however, does not tackle such thorny questions. It prefers to anchor itself in a philosophical relation to the doctrinal promises of the solution, rather than to the posthegemonic truth of the problem itself. The article of faith placed in the signifiers *pedagogy* and *consciousness* in the *Notebooks* applies to the ideological and the superstructural, but it remains unclear in what way it applies, and sustains its relation, to the *real*, *actual* and *material* under the future dictatorship of the proletariat. How do we know, via Gramsci's *Notebooks*, that Leninist hegemony would be utterly alien to the ideological and material alienation that props up bourgeois hegemony, in such a way that reconciliation would bring about the abolition of all contradictions, the unification of thought and sensuous reality, and the full conquest of the unity of the totality? We can place our faith in Peter Thomas's faith in Gramsci's Leninism, certainly. But from a position of posthegemonic apostasy, such a faith is simply no longer convincing, or deemed to be productive, in the 21st century. The posthegemonic demand is that we at least begin to do what Gramsci and Gramscianism have not done and indeed cannot do, that is, reckon with the negativity that Laclau referred to in *New Reflections* as that which "cannot be recovered through any *Aufhebung*".

What we can say is that hegemony, on both sides of the divide that exists within the overall terrain of economic and human alienation, is a political *technique* that strives to cast un-recuperable, abyssal negativity into oblivion, thereby minimizing the question of superstructural/ideological alienation in the name of the unitary power of consciousness. It proposes to do this via the reharmonization of the particularities and differences inherent to alienation, and via the forging of a unifying common sense, of a national

pedagogy, a national-popular literature and culture, and the moral authority of the Party etc.

But Gramsci highlighted from prison another emerging historical challenge to the de-alienation of modern labor. He referred to this challenge as "Americanism", in which the economic base dominates the superstructure. In his first Notebook Gramsci is concerned with the possible reasons why Italy did not have a revolution in the 19th century like the French did in the 18th century. He asks, in other words, whether there could be a bourgeois revolution without Jacobin force, and therefore how modernizing social transformation could come about in the absence of a specifically Italian Jacobinism? As such, he turns to the question of Italy as the historical problem of the national bourgeoisie in ways he did not do in his pre-prison writings (though the north/south divide certainly points in the direction of this problematic prior to his incarceration). Having said that, by Gramsci's own admission the revolutionary juncture had already passed in Italy by the time he was imprisoned, which might indicate that he was coming to terms with the fact that the preeminent place of the French (Jacobian) tradition in the history of the communist left up to the Paris Commune had already entered a period of crisis (Gramsci considered the Russian experience to be an anomaly). In *Notebook I* the French Revolution points to the movement of the Jacobins pushing the bourgeoisie in directions it would not naturally go. It also outlines the movement of the bourgeoisie absorbing Jacobin energies in order to extend its hegemony over the economic-political life of society. The Jacobins in France "perceive the interests of tomorrow"⁴⁹ and via their action "made of the bourgeoisie the dominant class"⁵⁰. The question of the relation between "now" and "tomorrow" points to the natural tendency of the bourgeoisie to uphold the status quo, and to Jacobinism as "the only party of the revolution" to force the bourgeoisie to extend "common interests" beyond itself. This is where historical materialism takes center stage, as much as a question for Gramsci as it is a solution.

Gramsci seems to be concerned with how there could be a change of any kind in Italy in the absence of the "interests of tomorrow" "forcing the hand" of the bourgeoisie, and in the absence of a bourgeoisie willing to allow itself to be dialecticized by a specifically Italian Jacobinist force? He returns on numerous occasions in this Notebook to the formation, role and composition of the "arditi" perhaps hoping to see in them the prototype for a specifically organic Jacobin force, a traditional Italian current. What we begin to see is that if Jacobin force alone creates the coming of tomorrow, then revolution without revolution would have to fall to those intellectuals capable of forging an identity "between the represented and

⁴⁸ A. Gramsci, *Cuadernos...*, *op. cit.*, p. 146 [Q10, #12].

⁴⁹ A. Gramsci, *Prison notebooks*, vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

the representative”⁵¹. Hegemony, in other words, in preparation of “the right moment”.

However, the unresolved discussion of the relation or non-relation between French and Italian bourgeoisies and their Jacobin or non-Jacobin counterparts is complicated in the first Notebook by the emergence of “Americanism”. What Gramsci sees in this emerging technologization of life is an economic juggernaut that conforms neither to the Jacobin perception of the interests of tomorrow nor to the bourgeoisie’s ability to absorb and reformulate their force. In reference to Americanism –that is, to the total reinvention of work and self-discipline on the basis of social rationalization, demographic uniformity, and unfettered productionism (all qualities that were very attractive to Gramsci)– there is no talk of either Jacobin force or of the bourgeoisie absorbing its counter tendencies, perhaps indicating the emergence of a bourgeoisie that is unrecognizable from within the parameters of the French Revolution, the Italian Risorgimento, and the Bolshevik experience. Could we go so far as to say that in Americanism the bourgeoisie moves in a completely different way in the direction of “tomorrow”? Does Americanism signal the first realization of the unmooring of the Marxist understanding of Jacobin/bourgeois authority and action that dominated the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th? Does it signal the beginning of the end of a practical *a priori* –the historical passage from the French Revolution to Bolshevism– which Gramsci could find no reason to relinquish? Buci-Glucksmann is of the opinion that Gramsci shows a certain critical ambivalence in relation to Americanism⁵². But there is more to it than ambivalence. Gramsci was fascinated by Americanism’s unfettered industrial productionism, and there is little ambivalence in Gramsci’s observation that “Anti-Americanism is comical, first of all; it is also stupid”⁵³. The only thing missing for Gramsci in Americanism is the existence of a modern integralist intelligentsia: “That there exists in America a criticism of manners is an important cultural fact: it means that self-criticism continues to grow, that a new American civilization is emerging that is conscious of its strengths and weaknesses. The intellectuals are detaching themselves from the dominant class in order to unite themselves to it more closely, to be a real superstructure and not just an inorganic and indistinct element of the structure-corporation”⁵⁴. If this detachment were the case in the 1930-1932 period, it is clearly no longer so, and has not been for a long time.

Peter Thomas considers “passive revolution” as “primarily a contribution to the central strategic debates of the Marxist tradition of Gramsci’s time”⁵⁵. But to what extent can the transformative inheritance

of the passive revolution be turned on its head? One can say that, yes, passive revolution is primarily a contribution to the central strategic debates of the Marxist tradition of Gramsci’s time. That is obvious. However, in light of the promise of the de-alienation that underlies those debates, what makes passive revolution a transformative inheritance now? Perhaps we can suggest that what passive revolution does, when viewed through the lens of the alienation/de-alienation relation, is to bring to light the insufficiency of the strategic debates themselves, since they seem to have left untouched the question of whether “Revolution”–understood as the first step toward human de-alienation– is revolutionary enough, or, indeed, revolutionary (de-alienating) at all within the history of the bourgeois mode of production? Does Americanism signal the historical point at which “the central strategic debates of the Marxist tradition” encounter their epochal limit, perhaps floundering on account of the fact that the (Hegelian) logic of history is not in fact going in the direction of communist de-alienation after all, but in the bourgeois-imperial direction of the planetary will for calculation, technique and technological domination, which was signaled in the 20th century primarily by Martin Heidegger?

In Gramsci hegemony promises, via the figure of the paid worker alone, the rational re-unification, the re-naturing, of alienated labor via the de-alienating universalization and unification of human morality in the form of industrial productionism and communist freedom. Hegemony supposedly renders the everyday experience of a fully externalized and socialized alienation moot. The place for the active dismantling of alienation is to be found in the forms of associationism that civil society assumes and strives to extend. It is here, in this zone of associationism of interests, common institutions, and wills, that both the superstructure required for the extension of bourgeois property is grounded, and also where the superstructure of its overthrow can be taught and learned. This –the associationism that we refer to as civil society– is the terrain of battle between the determinant forms of economic alienation and the politics that either sustains it, or overthrows and redistributes it, depending on which class dominates (bourgeoisie or proletariat). On both sides, all definitions circle around the historical universalizing force of the wage laborer. This is the central, and fundamentally necessary, figure for the moral and sociological unification, harmonization and totalization required for a fully de-alienating praxis of emancipation, for the promise of a fully de-alienated relation of Man to Nature and Society, and therefore for the transcending of the entire history of the so-called primitive accumulation.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

⁵² Ch. Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and...*, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁵³ A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 355.

⁵⁵ P. D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony, and Marxism*, Chicago, Haymarket, 2011, p. 146.

3. A Third Thing: Non-Equivalence (2021)

But all is not well in the kingdom of de-alienation, and what follows is not intended as an after-thought but as the framing of a real question for the contemporary devotees of the genealogies of hegemony. In her 1997 book, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Saidiya Hartman explored the bodily, economic, cultural, social, juridical, and affective “enormity of the breach instituted by slavery and the magnitude of domination” in the wake of the great event of an American “Emancipation” that never delivered⁵⁶. “Even the Gramscian model”, Hartman observes, “with its reformulation of the relation of state and civil society in the concept of the historical bloc and its expanded definition of the political, maintains a notion of the political inseparable from the effort and the ability of a class to effect hegemony”⁵⁷. But the singularity of the modern afterlife of slavery –the burden of black individuality born of a “freedom” only ever yoked to subordination– points in a direction other than that of the Gramscian model. Hartman emphasizes in relation to, and against, Gramsci “the limits of the political and the difficulty of translating or interpreting the practices of the enslaved within that framework. The everyday practices of the enslaved occur in the default of the political”⁵⁸.

The “default of the political” –the infra-excess or other side of every political and social positivity (such as pedagogy and consciousness)–, where blackness exists in the absolute (and absolutely untranslatable) brutality of its alienation and estrangement, brings into question Gramsci’s claims to the civilizational advancement and social unification discerned in the early 1930s under the nomenclature of “Americanism”. Presumably, for Hartman the latter –a fully technologized and unifying American “civilization” grounded in productionism– would merely signal a form of discipline unleashed by the abandonment of the whip. It would be a name for those “forms of constraint and discipline [that] did not depend upon the spectacle of whipping or the lash but nonetheless produced compliant and productive bodies”, for, she affirms, “slavery was both the wet nurse and the bastard offspring of liberty”⁵⁹. From within Hartman’s critical framework, in which the history of emancipation is indiscernible from the yoke of subordination, Gramsci’s fascination with “Americanism” would not be distinguishable from the consolidation of an economic base and superstructure fully invested in the redistribution and re-dimensioning of the exclusiveness of white property, and of whiteness as

property. In other words, any promise of the structural de-alienation of the economic base would not signify anything other than the continuation of black social death by other civilizational means.

More recently Hartman’s groundbreaking insights have been further systematized and radicalized by Frank B. Wilderson III and others, under the auspices of “Afropessimism”, which conceives itself as a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the Gramscian and Laclauian inheritance of the post-Leninist Left *tout court*, and therefore also of hegemony-thinking, coalitional organizing, consciousness-raising, and therefore the explicit and implicit promises of political, economic and conceptual de-alienation.

Afropessimism is the interrogation of the assumptive logic of human capacity itself, in which the latter has only ever been experienced as an offense imposed on black life by the modern history of white aggression (bourgeois and proletarian). Wilderson III notes that blackness “cannot exist as other than slaveness”⁶⁰. For this reason, black life in civil society is subject not to “a system of laws, codes, and mores that dispense violence against those who transgress its laws and codes of behavior” (a system built around the analogous experience of its subjects, in other words), but to “a juggernaut of murderous vengeance void of contingency, trial, or debate... *violence without sanctuary is the sine qua non of Blackness*”⁶¹. In 2003, Wilderson III addressed the Gramscian legacy explicitly:

Civil society is the terrain where hegemony is produced, contested, mapped. And the invitation to participate in hegemony’s gestures of influence, leadership, and consent is not extended to the black subject. We live in the world, but exist outside of civil society. This structurally impossible position is a paradox because the black subject, the slave, is vital to civil society’s political economy: s/he kick-starts capital at its genesis and rescues it from its over-accumulation crisis at its end –black death is its condition of possibility. Civil society’s subaltern, the worker, is coded as waged, and wages are white. But marxism has no account of this phenomenal birth and life-saving role played by the black subject: in Gramsci we have consistent silence⁶².

While the Marxian view of alienation, as something soon to be transcended, forms the horizon of all historical materialism’s philosophic, historical, anthropological and sociological thinking⁶³, Wilderson III highlights that since the slave is not human the coalition-based associationism of civil society makes space only for humanity, which is only ever white,

⁵⁶ S. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 53.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁵⁸ *Idem*.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 139.

⁶⁰ F. B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2020, p. 229.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 160–161.

⁶² “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?”, *Social Identities*. Vol. 9(2). 2003, pp. 237–238.

⁶³ K. Axelos, *Alienation...*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

and for the sustained and on-going violence of its humanist metaphysics. The dialectical recuperation of the humanity of the species promised by de-alienation is only ever anti-black. This means that from an Afropessimist perspective Gramsci's approach to and sustained interest in "Americanism"—together with his belief in its civilizational originality—is equivalent to the active occlusion of the afterlife of slavery and therefore of the entire problematic of the non-human.

Afropessimism, in contrast, positions itself on, and occupies experientially and conceptually, the absolute limit of the place where the universalist premise of human de-alienation has been narrativized into a logic of production and political emancipation. In the Afropessimist challenge to the metaphysics of hegemony, the entire premise of de-alienation—the entire metaphysics of humanism that underlies it and the forging of its analogous human experiences—is refused. From within the framework of hegemony, the black subject can always be recuperated, translated, and metaphorized for the benefit of the metaphysical fictions of the merely positive. But any transformation that takes place in the black subject would be essentially Euro-logocentric and imperial. In contrast, for Afropessimism blackness is the negativity that is so negative that "it cannot be recovered through any *Aufhebung*. It is something which simply shows the limits of the constitution of objectivity and cannot be dialecticized"⁶⁴. It is on this basis that Afropessimism negates the techniques of recuperation that are inherent to the place of the subaltern when it is understood as the determinate negation that, in debt to Hegel, constitutes Leninist, Gramscian and Laclauian understandings of hegemony. Rather, Afropessimism

thinks against this sociology, in relation to the unrecoverable and untranslatable site of subalternity understood as "the absolute limit of the place at which history is narrativized into logic"⁶⁵. The singularity of black being uncovers the place of abyssal negativity, alienation, and estrangement which is the silent condition of possibility of "Americanism" in Gramsci's thinking.

It is with Gayatri Spivak's heretical definition of subalternity in mind—a definition that lies at the heart of the first extensive critical accounts of posthegemony published twenty years ago⁶⁶—that we can see that "posthegemony" and "afropessimism" are the names of non-equivalent (indeed, of experientially and historically incompatible) registers for thinking through the limits between negativity, technique, and the Enlightenment metaphysics of humanist subjectivism and emancipation. They think differentially in relation to the infrapolitical (existential) default of the political, understanding the latter in both its liberal and historical-materialist manifestations as the quest for hegemony and for the domination of technique, which is only ever built on the active occlusion of true negativity.

Finally, perhaps it is on account of their differential relation to the infrapolitical default of, and distance from, the political—that is, on account of their insistence on the necessity of an existential reckoning with the abyssal negativity that cannot be dialecticized, with the inconspicuous unfolding of being itself to language⁶⁷—that when they place their cards face up on the table, both "posthegemony" and "afropessimism" encounter the consistent silence not only of Gramsci, but, indeed, of the entire tradition of Gramscianism as well.

References

- Arel, J. and Feuerhahn, N., "Translator's Introduction", in Martin Heidegger, *Hegel*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2015, pp. ix-xix.
- Axelos, K., *Alienation, Praxis, and Techne in the Thought of Karl Marx*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1976.
- Beasley-Murray, J., *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Blanchot, M., *The Infinite Conversation*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Buci-Glucksmann, Ch., *Gramsci and the State*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1980.
- Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, New York, Routledge, 1994.
- Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, vols. 1-3 (ed. and trans. J. A. Buttigieg), New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.
- , *Cuadernos de la cárcel*, Tomos 1-6 (ed. Valentino Gerratana), México, Ediciones Era, 2000.
- , *Pre-Prison Writings* (ed. Richard Bellamy), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Hartman, S., *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Heidegger, M., *Hegel*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2015.
- , "Letter on Humanism", in *Pathmarks*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 239-276.
- Laclau, E., *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, New York, Verso, 1990.

⁶⁴ E. Laclau, *New Reflections...*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁶⁵ G. Ch. Spivak, "Subaltern studies...", *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ A. Moreiras, *The exhaustion...*, *op. cit.*; G. Williams, *The other side...*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", *op. cit.*, p. 275.

- Moreiras, A., *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2001.
- , “Infrapolítica y política de la infrapolítica”, *Debats*, 128, nº 3, special issue on “Infrapolítica y posthegemonía,” ed. Alberto Moreiras, 2015, pp. 53-73.
- , *Infrapolítica (manual de uso)*, Madrid, La Oficina, 2020.
- Nancy, J.-L., *The Sense of the World*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Rodríguez-Matos, J., “De lo que agujerea lo Real: Lacan, crítico de la (pos)hegemonía”, *Debats*, Special issue on “Infrapolítica y posthegemonía” (ed. Alberto Moreiras), 128(3), 2015, pp. 29-40.
- Spivak, G. Ch., “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, in R. Guha y G. Ch. Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 3-32.
- Thomas, P., *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony, and Marxism*, Chicago, Haymarket, 2011.
- , “After (Post)Hegemony”, *Contemporary Political Theory*, vol. 20(2), 2021, pp. 318-40.
- Wilderson III, Frank B. *Afropessimism*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2020.
- , “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?”, *Social Identities*, vol. 9(2). 2003, pp. 2025-2040.
- Williams, G., *Infrapolitical Passages: Global Turmoil, Narco-Accumulation and the Post-Sovereign State*, New York, Forham University Press, 2021.
- , *The Other Side of the Popular. Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2002.