In this presentation, my intent is to investigate the consequences for intellectual and political work (or, to put this another way, for the politics of intellectual work) of the theory and the condition of posthegemony. I will be particularly concerned with the contributions to the debate over posthegemony provided by Alberto Moreiras on the one hand and Michael Hardt and Toni Negri on the other. The journalistic principle of full disclosure--honoured more in the breach than in the observance in academia as much as in journalism--requires that I reveal from the start that Alberto and Michael are both friends and teachers of mine. However, as this is a paper about the relation between solidarity and critique, between collaboration and disagreement, and between the social and the theoretical, the choice of these interlocutors (and even the awkwardness that may arise) is not only apt, but also perhaps inescapable.

The theory of posthegemony has two aspects; they can be summarised in the slogan (adapted from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) that “there is no hegemony and never has been” (see Beasley-Murray). Posthegemony, in other words, combines a historical observation that the theory of hegemony no longer helps explain contemporary social order with the more radical claim that it has only ever appeared to do so. At first sight it is the second, more radical, argument that seems to require most defence. Yet the historical analysis of posthegemony also raises some interesting and difficult issues, not the least of these being the question of when and why posthegemony became a condition, when and why we started to live the truth of posthegemony. Indeed, this interface between the two aspects of posthegemony, which would require an explanation of the wane of what we might...
term the hegemony of hegemony, still requires much thought. Today, however, I will concentrate upon posthegemony in its temporal incarnation, on the consequences of the fact that posthegemony has become our lived experience. I will proceed by exploring a few of the many possible theses on this aspect of posthegemony.

1. The decline of ideology is posthegemony’s visible symptom. In that hegemony theory is, in essence, a theory about the social efficacy of ideology, it is clear that when the power or even the very existence of ideology is seen to wane, hegemony theory automatically loses its power to convince us that hegemony is the sine qua non of social organisation. Today it is almost a commonplace of social analysis to claim that we are now witnessing the decline of ideology. Indeed, the very commonplace nature of this observation might itself be a symptom of the waning of ideology: across (what was once) the political spectrum there is rough agreement over ideology’s contemporary insignificance. Thus on the one hand, state-affiliated thinkers and politicians from Francis Fukuyama in the US to the New Labour hierarchy in the UK argue that with the end of the Cold War, there is no longer any clash of clearly defined oppositional ideologies: liberal-democratic capitalism is simply a matter of common sense, and socialism an intellectually bankrupt dogma. Indeed, in place of a range of political alternatives, making up a series of choices available at any one time, the so-called Third Way institutes a diachronic and univocal conception of politics: now there are only conservatives and progressives, one way forward, and a series of obstacles to hold us back. With this, the politics of developmentalism finally arrives in the First World.

   Yet side by side with this triumphalist version of ideology’s (and history’s) end is a certain anxiety. For the end of ideology is often taken to mean that people are now simply less interested in politics and in political discourse than they once were; declining electoral turnout in many Western democracies (most obviously the United States, but also the UK) are taken to show that political narratives no longer have any mobilising force, and that voter apathy reigns. Even when the reason given for this democratic deficit is that economic well-being precludes political investment, the potential loss of political legitimation underlying Bush’s appointment to the Presidency and Labour’s supposed electoral landslide alike remains the dirty little secret that threatens to rain on liberal capitalism’s parade. Once again, however, we note that what was previously held to distinguish the First from the Third World no longer serves that function of separating so-called developed from so-called developing countries. The end of history is less a triumphant arrival than a permanent striving in media res; less a bang than a whimper.
Finally, and in an analysis that links posthegemony to postmodernity, the end of ideology is also announced by those who suggest that neoliberal regimes construct and rely upon new forms of rule for which ideology no longer plays a significant role; in other words, that post-ideology entails not so much the evacuation of politics from public life, but rather its more sinister insinuation into every pore of society as the distinction between the political and the social is eroded. This is the argument of the latest new Left, represented above all by Hardt and Negri’s Empire, but prefigured in Hardt’s essay on the withering of civil society, itself an extended commentary on Gilles Deleuze’s argument that we have moved from a society characterised by discipline to a society characterised by control. Here, whereas ideology followed a logic of distanciation and representation, and hegemony the resolution of conflict by means of a (quasi)transcendental state, posthegemony’s logic is applied immediately and ubiquitously, and the state has become immanent to the social field as a whole. This is the nightmarish inversion of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the “total state”: yes, the state has come to be directly responsive to the demands made of it by (what was once) the people; but those responses are provided according to the terms of capital accumulation, and in the name of pure command now that responsiveness has been divorced from any sense of responsibility. Here again the First World lags behind the Third: has there been any better instantiation of the society of control than Vladimiro Montesinos’s almost invisible permeation of the socius by means of video technology in what was nominally Fujimori’s Peru?

2. Posthegemony entails a shift from (conscious) discourse to (unconscious) affect. Slavoj Zizek’s discussion of Peter Sloterdijk’s Critique of Cynical Reason homes in on the main consequence of posthegemony for historical analysis: the concept of false consciousness (and all its various cognates, of which hegemony is simply the most sophisticated) is no longer sufficient to answer the classic question (the first and still most fundamental question of political theory) as to why the oppressed collude in their own oppression. Sloterdijk’s analysis of post-war (perhaps more accurately, post-1968) West Germany uncovers “a universal, diffuse cynicism,” which is “that state of consciousness that follows after naive ideologies and their enlightenment” (Critique of Cynical Reason 3). The paradigmatic cynical figure here is “an average social character in the upper echelons of the elevated superstructure” (4) who is aware that he or she is exploited in work and alienated in the face of the products of the culture industry, but who continues on none-the-less, with the spirit of “a detached negativity [. . .] that scarcely allows itself any hope, at most a little irony and pity” (6). Zizek’s conclusion, drawn from Sloterdijk’s observations, is that we need to replace Marx’s definition of ideology as summed
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up in the phrase “they do not know it, but they are doing it” (The Sublime Object of Ideology 28) with the post-ideological formula, “they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it” (29).

As a result, the analysis of discourse in search of the distortions produced by ideological operations is now superfluous. The hermeneutics of suspicion are rendered redundant. Here, social control and social order are maintained outside (or even despite) discourse. As Zizek puts it, now that it can be recognized that “ideology is not simply a ‘false consciousness,’ an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’” (21). Zizek calls us to analyse the fundamental ways in which “ideology structures the social reality itself” (30) beyond or despite discourse (in Zizek’s terms, beyond or despite the symbolic register). Posthegemony signifies the shift from a rhetoric of persuasion to a regime in which what counts are the effects produced and orchestrated by affective investment in the social, if by affect we mean the order of bodies rather than the order of signification. What is now required, therefore, is a methodology appropriate to the understanding of affect. In the words of Spinoza, words so often quoted by Deleuze, we still “know not what a body can do” (Ethics 88).

Alberto Moreiras and I have tried to initiate the topographical mapping of affect required for the posthegemonic condition in a recent issue of Angelaki. This mapping is best compared to a topography because it consists in the quasi-geometrical or geological charting of the undulations and intensities of affective investment that (immanently) constitute a social landscape. Again, the immanence of this relation between affect and social order has to be underscored: it is not so much that affective relations hold society together, as that society itself is the totality of these relations. A topography of affect is, then, simultaneously a remapping of social order--at the same time that it also indicates the faultlines and the bound social energies that can erupt into social disorder. John Kraniauskas, with his series of studies of what he terms “Eva Peronism” (see for instance “Porno-Revolution”) has pioneered ways of uncovering the mechanisms by which the state depends upon (and is indeed, parasitical upon) bodies ordered and disordered, mobilised and demobilised, by the flows and pulsations of populist love. Where I continue to disagree with Kraniauskas is in his positing of Evita as a state apparatus, which obscures the doubling required by populist regimes, whereby the state arises (literally) behind Evita’s back as the institutional scaffold that transcends the space in which the people are brought together, uniting them reciprocally from a distance. It is only under conditions of full posthegemony that the state and affective relations are fully immanent to each other, as the populist leader comes down from his balcony to become the neopopulist pragmatist, who acts as though at one with the
Beasley-Murray, “Subaltern Politics” 5

multitude--think of the difference between Alán García’s balconazos and Alberto Fujimori’s hats, between Margaret Thatcher’s handbag and Tony Blair’s ever-present mug of tea.

Hence, 3., with posthegemony, the multitude comes to the forefront as the privileged subject of society. Here Marx was wrong: the history of all hitherto-existing societies is less the history of class struggle than, at a still more primordial level, it is the history of the struggle to produce class. Class is a category that belongs to the order of economic stratification, state classification, and above all (self-)representation. Class provides the means for naming some of the various divisions of labour that have characterised human history. But the fundamental labour is the work of producing society itself, and it is the multitude whose existence is this freely-given labour, and whose product is then returned to it in reified, alienated (and so, fetishised) form. But the multitude’s tendency is always expansive, and the reactive effort to reterritorialize its force increasingly desperate. The popular (a category that aims to erase the marks of internal division for the sake of retaining external boundaries) is the name given to the last great effort to define and put limits to the multitude, and for Latin America at least testimonio (rightly regarded by nascent Latin American cultural studies as the most transgressive of aesthetic forms) the final attempt at cultural mediation between multitude and state. Just as populism is the continuation of class politics by other means--the class politics that dare not speak its name--so Moreiras was the first (and still the most astute) to point out that testimonio’s apparent post-auratic quality retained and in fact intensified the aura associated with the literary canon, all in the guise of an apparent rejection of the hierarchies established by literary canons (“The Aura of Testimonio”); this post-aurality all the more insistently attempted to convert multitude into the people. If we were to chart a history of the Latin American multitude--and this is a history that has now to be charted, though James Dunkerley’s Americana and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s The Many-Headed Hydra are two books that uncover some part of that history (and see also Juan Antonio Hernández’s study of the Venezuelan Caracazo)--then the end of testimonio (so anxiously mourned by so many of the contributors to Georg Gugelberger’s The Real Thing) might best be seen as moment of the multitude’s first full emergence, and as the dawn of the condition of posthegemony.

The multitude is, then, both a transhistorical subject and a subject that emerges fully only with the advent of unadorned posthegemony. But that full emergence is not so much the multitude coming into plain view as it is the result of the fact that the multitude’s representational doubles have now been stripped away. The multitude still absolutely evades representation--this evasion (or refusal, to use
the term employed both by Moreiras [The Exhaustion of Difference 125] and by the autonomist tradition from which Negri derives) is, after all, the condition of the multitude's existence. Political society would inevitably misrecognize the multitude, and it is only in the apparent evacuation of politics and of the political that political discourse indicates the multitude's emergence. Indeed, in so far as the multitude is now named, it is as the negation of the one process that the multitude itself cannot (and would not) negate: if there is one thing that the anti-globalisation protesters of Seattle, Gothenburg, and Genoa (to name but some of the stops in the trajectory of their resistance) are not protesting, it is globalisation.

At this point, however, it is time to register some disagreements, and the status of the multitude is perhaps the site of some of the most important of these. Yesterday Moreiras posed the following as the question most likely and most fundamentally to divide the field of Latin American cultural studies: “Do you believe that there can be an end to subalternity?” It was suggested that there were three possible answers, following the model provided by opinion polling: yes, no, or don’t know. Negri poses a very similar question, and in combining (but then perhaps rejecting) both questions we may shed some light on the options for intellectual practice in the context of the posthegemonic condition. Negri writes: “The question is the following: How can this biopolitical (intellectual and cooperative) mass that we call the ‘multitude’ exercise a ‘government of its own’? How can the plurality and the cooperation of singularities, given the fact that they form the constituent power of the world, express the government of the common?” (Kairôs, Alma Venus, Multitude 147). Combining the two questions, and going by the assumption that the multitude’s self-government would entail the end of subalternity, gives us the subalternist question framed in the terms of posthegemony: “Do you believe that the multitude can exercise a ‘government of its own’?” Yes, no, or don’t know. Let me wager that Hardt and Negri would answer “yes,” to this question, and that Moreiras would answer “no.” This is, as Moreiras himself suggests, a significant, if not the most significant, difference between their two positions.

But of course there are problems with this question, not least with the way in which it predicts (or previsions) its own answers. After all, if neoliberalism is calculating in anything (and it may not in fact be calculating in much), it is so in its reliance on opinion polling as the immanent (because ubiquitous if also random) means by which the multitude is quantified and measured, if not fully represented. To suggest that there are only three (mutually exclusive) answers to a yes/no question is to force a respondent’s hand, to offer the simulacrum of choice and to prioritise opinion over action, intellect over the body, and ideology (once more)
over affect. How then to answer? Perhaps with a wager, along the lines of the wager proposed by Pascal as answer to the equally impossible and equally unanswerable question about the existence of God. The question aims to sound out faith, but let us answer in terms of practice. Let us act as though the multitude could exercise its own self-government—let us therefore in our own actions affirm the possibility (if not the probability) of the multitude’s instituting the government of the common—and, in true posthegemonic fashion, we may find (in Pascal’s words) “custom [to be] the source of our strongest and most believed proofs,” for “the body […] as Pascal never ceases to remind us, ‘has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing’” (Bourdieu, Pascalian Meditations 12).

The upshot of this would be that, 4., with posthegemony the problem of organisation supplants that of solidarity or critique. Here I begin to take up the challenge thrown down by Moreiras in The Exhaustion of Difference. Moreiras writes of the multitude: “Although I have some doubts about the philosophical underpinnings of the notion, which seem to me overly engaged with a metaphysics of productionism that in essence […] would not be too different from the very history of capitalist formation” (and we should note in passing that this marks quite some difference between Hardt/Negri and Moreiras), “it is nevertheless intriguing to think of the multitude […] as a moniker for a virtuoso practice of knowledge: could we then talk of a ‘multitudinous practice of Latin Americanism?’” (The Exhaustion of Difference 307). This would indeed be a wager—all the more so should Moreiras be correct in his worry that the multitude is in essence indifferent from Empire itself. But it would perhaps be the most ethical of wagers as, like Pascal, we would be wagering our own lives and livelihoods. We would be reorganizing Latin Americanism in parallel with the multitude.

This parallelism, which echoes Spinoza’s theory of the parallelism between the attributes of extension and thought, mind and body, seems crucial. For after all, in calling for action rather than opinion as the response to the question about the multitude’s possible teleology (and by the way, we might note that if Hardt and Negri have done nothing else, they have forcefully put the question of historical teleology back on the agenda), I am not suggesting that intellectuals should abandon theory and embrace activism to go out on the streets (whatever exactly that would mean). Of course, intellectuals should be on the streets (and in fact they are often to be found there, whether as pedestrians or as protesters), but it is an illusion to think that activism in itself resolves theoretical questions. Equally, however, I am not persuaded that theory is capable of resolving questions that arise out of activism. Solidarity (of the prosopopeic or representational variety that motivates cultural studies at least) and critique are both underpinned by a faith in the
influence of mind upon body in a manner utterly incompatible with posthegemony. The challenge rather is multitudinous autopoiesis, at the levels of the social, the institutional, and the intellectual.

Autopoiesis, or self-organisation, is far from the self-centredness or narcissistic self-criticism and self-regulation to which we are all too often said to retreat in, for instance, our endless critiques of critique and other much criticized tics of Latin American cultural studies. The multitude gains power only through establishing affective relations and combining its powers with other bodies. At the same time, the organisation of the multitude has nothing to do with homogeneity, resemblance, or equivalence: the multitude is a collection of singularities, with a tendency always to add more singularities towards the goal of uniting all singularities in a relation of continuous variation. If Néstor García Canclini yesterday announced the end of alliances within Latin American cultural studies, this fact can only be welcomed as the closure of an era of (pseudo)hegemonic and inevitably failed (because inevitably debilitating) groupings organized in terms of equivalence, and the opening of new combinations and modes of organisation, motley arrangements whose basis would be that each constituent body exercise its full power of singular existence.

While this project is far from the call ritually made of or by cultural studies that we should go out to the “real world” (wherever that may be; and after all it is the multitude that makes the world real), it is inevitable that the Latin Americanist multitude will intersect with the Latin American multitude whose history has yet to be written and whose future it has yet to make. And while it may sound abstract, I take the notion of a project (perhaps in contradiction to calculation, in that calculation involves abstraction, selection, and reservation) to be absolutely concrete, beginning as it does with the balance of forces and state of relations that exist in the present at any given time, and then projecting forward, expansively and productively, from that present. Why not start here and now? For if there should be any doubt that the Latin American Studies Association (as, yes, the most institutional and hierarchical reflection and representation of Latin Americanism) does not also harbour a nascent multitudinousness, a multitudinousness that propels and produces Latin Americanism, then perhaps Julio Ramos’s paper given last year at Miami might help kickstart the project of bringing the LASA multitude to light (“On Latin American Criticism”). Better still, a quick glance around this hotel this weekend should soon dispel any such doubt.

Moreiras concludes The Exhaustion of Difference with a defence, perhaps even an affirmation, of negation:
I have attempted throughout this book to move toward the aporetic moments of Latin Americanist knowledge and to push Latin Americanist fulfilment against its limit. My intent is not merely critical; it is also preparatory. If there is to be a politics of Latin American cultural studies that may have a chance at grasping what the political is, in other words, a politics that would not be merely administration, but one that could conceivably have some effect in preparing transformation, I believe that it must be articulated through as relentless and savage a practice of clearing as possible. Call it a labor of the negative, without which any positivity is only, at best, a pile of good intentions. Or call it critique. (299)

I would only add that I do not think that the preparation described here need be thought of as temporal; it may coexist simultaneously with another means by which Latin Americanism could--and should--be pushed to (and beyond) its limits, that is, by the affirmation of its multitudinousness, not least that which Moreiras’s book itself exemplifies.
works cited


