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Pirate Traces: An Existential Response to Gary Hall's 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory'

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Abstract

Late in the summer of 2019, Gary Hall gave a series of talks hosted by the Philosophy Department at Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City. One of them was titled 'Liberalism Must be Defeated. On the Obsolescence of Bourgeois Theory in the Anthropocene'. As the organizer of this event, I was curious about the reception of this argument in a context that does not usually name 'liberalism' as *the* enemy, even though it is no stranger to anti-bourgeois positions on intellectual activity. Universidad Iberoamericana is a private Jesuit college that has catered historically to the Mexican elites while upholding a reputation for its political commitments to democracy and social justice. Indeed, one could argue that it is a liberal alliance between religion and business that provides the conditions for the Philosophy Department's younger generation of scholars to teach and write about the kind of (French, German, Italian) radical theory that Gary Hall's work embraces and seeks to renew. While most attendants of the talk at IBERO did not at all lack the theoretical framework to understand in what sense liberalism must be defeated, or why bourgeois theory should be regarded as obsolete, I was curious about the conditions of taking Hall's performative argument on board. Was it a critique of how successful Anglo scholars operate, or was it also about how 'we' operate here in Mexico City? Is 'our' work liberal bourgeois theory too, and therefore *obsolete*? If so, could we do better than appear tolerant of a disruptive performance that was challenging us to aspire to something different, something unknown, something like existing otherwise?

Keywords

Mexico, elites, writing, literature, philosophy, theory, liberalism, gender, class, racism

“The way out of discourse, the exit, is a way to safety, a *poros* which appears unexpectedly, which no one can be sure of finding, and which is itself always aporetic: a true miracle, an encounter with a dolphin in the mid-ocean!”

Sarah Kofman, *Beyond Aporia*

Gary Hall’s (2019) meditation on the obsolescence of ‘bourgeois theory’ in the Anthropocene begins with a story about a well-known Parisian intellectual who turns to autobiographical writing around the time of his father’s death. What does it mean to have grown up poor and gay, and what does it mean that one’s lifetime of intellectual work now seems unintelligible to the working-class culture and environment that education provided one an *escape* from? From ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’ we do not learn about the Parisian intellectual’s extended answer to such questions. We only learn that, together with his friends, he sets out to ‘reinvent theory’ by displaying ‘a lack of respect for the rules’ of university decorum. It looks as if the intellectual has been able to escape once more, now from the perplexities that a lifetime inevitably generates, via an autobiographical rekindling of a charismatic figure, namely, the political intellectual of the *French* cultural repertoire.

Such a solution does not work well for Gary Hall, a professional theorist confronting a distinctively anti-intellectual *English* culture. In order to show a ‘lack of respect for the rules’ in this particular context, Hall must actively reject auto-biographical writing, for the use of such a register would be too much of a concession to the liberal humanist elites who get to define the culture as bound to ‘normative ideas of the human subject, the proprietorial author, the codex print book, critical reflection, linear thought, the long-form argument, self-expression, originality, creativity, fixity, and copyright’ (2019: 1). According to Hall, the fact that education in general, and the reading and writing of literature in particular, are today perceived in England as ‘a means of freeing the mind of a rational human individual’ (2019: 3) is linked with the plain fact that a more or less fixed and unchanging elite continues to have an almost absolute control of the means of cultural production in the UK. Only by rejecting *their* assumptions about literate personhood can a question about the meaning of one’s life and achievements after the death of a father be transformed into the broader critical question about the material conditions of ‘radical theory’ at the site of its production, namely, the (neo)liberal university in the UK.

Beyond reiterating the widespread condemnation of competitive individualism and prestige-seeking in contemporary academic life, Hall diagnoses them à la Wendy Brown; that is, as undesired consequences of secretly dear, hard-to-give-up liberal humanism. Radical theorists may not be philosophical or economic liberals, but their disavowed attachment to a liberal framework for intellectual work is evinced by the ways in which they write, publish and, thereby, compete. Lack of respect for the rules need not, therefore, take the form of a masculine rebel yell. In Hall's version it is more like a kind of civil disobedience, a way of 'exploring what forms our work can take if, in its performance, it doesn't simply go along with the pressure the neoliberal university places on us to deliver ever more quicker, and with the accompanying spread of managerial technologies of measurement and commodification such as rankings, citation indexes, and other metrics' (2019: 9). From the impossible perspective of climate breakdown, could such an exploration be possible at all without an other's lack of respect; that is, without a *real* interruption to academic normality?

Before being published in *Media Theory*, 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' was delivered as a talk in, among other places, Universidad Iberoamericana Mexico City. The Philosophy Department hosted the talk, and I organized it as part of an incipient project titled 'Philosophy of editorial practice'. A couple of months later I was kindly invited to write this commentary, which I am doing belatedly during a massive disruption of university life, as the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic moves towards Latin America. From a 'socially distanced' – and therefore bourgeois – corner of the pandemic, I can vaguely remember the polite reception of Gary Hall's talk at IBERO, and I wonder whether I expected anything other than politeness in that by-gone cosmopolitan era. I also ask myself what my project means now, after the end of the world of academic normality, which coincided with the passing of a close friend. My friend Pilar Vázquez was a professional translator, so I am thinking a lot about translation these days, and about Sarah Kofman's definition of it as 'the philosophical gesture *par excellence*' (1988: 8). In this sense, translation is not reducible to the fact that Pilar translated John Berger's work into Spanish, or that I translated Gary Hall's talk into Spanish when he came to Mexico.

What is translation then, and what does it have to do with anti-bourgeois theory? My first attempt at tackling this existential question – presumably the same kind of question that moved both the French and the English characters of *Anti-Bourgeois Theory* in the first place – was about trying to understand the historical, social and cultural context in which I read and translated Gary Hall's work. My second attempt was about trying to formulate a philosophical position on Hall's injunction to 'defeat liberalism' through performing a 'lack of respect for the rules' of academic normality. Since the philosophical gesture *par excellence* is also a gesture of betrayal (Kofman, 1988: 8), I ended up questioning such an injunction in two respects. The first concerns the relation between 'anti-bourgeois theory' and 'inhuman theory'. The second concerns the place of subjectivity – in a sense that is actually opposite to 'liberal humanism' – within 'inhuman theory'. I do not go as far as developing a full-blown, coherent argument for or against Hall's injunction to defeat liberalism by means of inhuman theory. Instead, I try to draw attention to an infrapolitical dimension of thought that, in my view, was better *translated* by the 'pirate philosophy' avatar of Gary Hall's work. It is in such an infrapolitical dimension that I find the condition for cultivating freedom, before and after any classed, raced or gendered instance of 'lack of respect for the rules'.

I. Liberalism in Elitist Mexico

On reading 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' I was struck by Hall's diagnosis of English liberal humanism as an end result of the brutally masculinist socialization of the elites that has historically taken place in the public schools (2019: 6-7). Such a diagnosis made me think about the meanings of liberal humanism in Mexico, about the relations between liberalism and the socialization of overwhelmingly male intellectual elites and, finally, about how the specific histories of liberalism in Mexico may be informing *our* writing practices in the Mexican university today. None of this can be taken for granted, since outside of the English-speaking world the term 'liberalism' is quite difficult to grasp, or so we learn from an entry in the 'dictionary of the untranslatables' directed by French philosopher Barbara Cassin. There, Audard and Raynaud distinguish liberal philosophy and economic liberalism from a vague yet

distinctively Anglo Saxon ‘social and cultural attitude’ (2018: 852). If, as Hall suggests, such a social and cultural attitude is hegemonic in England because public school-educated elites still control the culture industries, what do *we* in Mexico get from ‘our’ intellectual elites, and what does that have to do with how we operate as scholars in the university?

In Mexico, talk of ‘liberalism’ belongs to literary writers, political philosophers or historians of national history. According to the dominant narrative, liberalism was defeated as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, when the stronger cultural influence of French positivism became institutionalized in the modernizing visions and the educational practices of an authoritarian state (Leyva, 2018: 49). In popular culture, ‘liberals’ come to mind as quaint characters from school textbooks – as when current president Andrés Manuel López Obrador invokes the fathers of the nation in order to explain his revolutionary project to the Mexican people, but is certainly unlikely that liberalism in the third sense of ‘a social and cultural attitude’ ever became as widespread in Latin American societies as it did in the cradle of liberalism, or the UK. What is relevant here is that such a difference has to do with the history, the material conditions and the symbolic status of writing in Hispanic American nations such as Mexico. Seemingly universal or ‘liberal’ notions of proprietary authorship, self-expression, originality, creativity, fixity, and copyright came much after what Graciela Montaldo describes as ‘a regime of the letter that imposed itself during the colony and which was not just a disciplining by means of an exclusionary practice – writing – but above all by means of a hegemonic tongue, Spanish, upon a multiplicity of indigenous languages’ (2017: nonpag). In Hispanic America, then, the uses and understandings of ‘liberalism’ have to do with the fact that writing came to be defined not in relation to art, but rather in relation to politics. As a result, what was recognized as ‘literature’ in Europe remained a marginal expression of writing in the Hispanic American nations for much of the nineteenth century, and for some critics remains marginal even to this day (Ollé-Laprune, 2011). At any rate, instead of liberal bourgeois values, the practice of writing in Mexico has embodied *criollo* values – those of the Spanish colonisers’ descendants. Their vision was, of course, to position the nation as part of the civilised world, for which they had to do ‘literature’ in the specific sense of colonizing the ‘barbarous’ other through its fictionalization.

In his classic sociological study of twentieth century Mexican intellectuals (1985), Roderic Ai Camp argues that the definition of such figures was largely determined by Mexico's precarious economy and the weakness of its institutions after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921). Books sold so little that writers chose a career in public office out of economic necessity. While it was not necessary to be born wealthy in order to become a prominent intellectual, it was however necessary to make political connections through a mentor, and mentors were mostly found in higher education institutions concentrated in Mexico City. In the 1940s and 1950s, the role played by the public schools in England was most closely resembled in Mexico by the National University (UNAM) and the National Preparatory School (ENP). Unlike the former, ENP and UNAM drew most of its students from middle and lower middle-class backgrounds. The strongly positivist and highly charged anti-clerical atmosphere at ENP and UNAM eventually led the more middle-class sectors to migrate to more liberal private universities such as Jesuit Universidad Iberoamericana, which is still among the three universities that continue to provide a meeting point for various Mexican elites. The point is, however, that the historic association between writing and politics became more entrenched. Once in Mexico City, would-be intellectuals met through collaboration in journals and contacts in the publishing world. By means of their close association with political mentors and state politics, many of the historic representatives of 'Mexican literature' were able to exert considerable influence on public life.

As Camp continues to note in *Mexico's Mandarins* (2002), traditionally writers – that is, political essayists, novelists and poets rather than academic theorists – formed groups or circles surrounding an important publication that was tightly closed to the ideas of non-members. Such circles typically reached a very limited audience, namely, urban, educated, middle-class residents concentrated in Mexico City. This basic composition of Mexican intellectual elites and their audiences changed very slowly after the violent crushing of the student movement in 1968, when intellectuals split between those who would continue to cooperate with the government and those who retreated into the universities. Not surprisingly, it was the state itself that gave this alternative to intellectuals. By becoming professional academics and artists, intellectuals gained some ideological autonomy, but lost power to influence state politics. Thus began the liberal age of 'civil society', feminism, study abroad

scholarships, and contemporary art. Eventually, through the creation of state agencies devoted to scientific excellence, culture and the arts, the neoliberal state was able to assimilate an expanded intellectual milieu, and quite successfully gave rise to the export-oriented academic intellectual – which is the one that *we* are, in so far as we are measured, institutionally, in terms of scientific article output, impact metrics and other globalized economic standards of proprietary authorship, self-expression, originality, creativity, fixity, and copyright. In sum, it seems to have been only yesterday that we became something like ‘liberal humanists’ in Gary Hall’s sense of the term. But how does that sit with the longer history of writing, politics and the shifting models of ‘the intellectual’ in Mexico?

In ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’, Hall points to the English elite’s control of the British culture and media industries as the explanation of liberal humanism as a hegemonic culture and of the fact that women and BAME authors continue to be shockingly underrepresented in that culture (see also Kean, 2019). He then asks whether introducing some quotas would make the culture less liberal humanist, and therefore less anti-intellectual. This is an interesting question to be asked in the Mexican context, wherein elite masculinity does not appear as anti-intellectual, but rather as ‘high and hard’ intellectuality, to borrow the words of Emily Hind. In her recent book on *Dude Lit* (2019), Hind correctly observes that ‘a famous writer’s name persists as the symbol – literally, in Mexico, the signage – of intellectual prowess’ (2019: 5). Her reading of ‘Mexican literature’ as a performance of power resonates with Camp’s research only by starting with the fact that it was economic and institutional precarity that drove would-be intellectuals to seek status recognition through informal politics. By positioning gender at the heart of these dynamics, however, Hind actually exposes the limitations of Camp’s liberal approach. In Mexico, the construction of an authorial reputation has historically involved performing the *macho* role of a civilized barbarian. If we think of liberal humanism in the Mexican context as a ‘careful balance between bad boy rule breaking and gentlemanly scholarship’ (2019: 16), we easily understand why its concrete benefits have been unavailable to women, and indeed to anyone effectively marked as a barbarian within the colonial regime of the letter.

One of the legacies of nineteenth century Mexican liberalism is that women (like all other marginalized groups) have not been formally excluded from any level of education since the second half of that century. Yet an overwhelming majority of the Mexican intellectuals studied by Roderic Ai Camp were men, as were the members of the other Mexican elites – military, religious, business and political elites – that Camp has also studied. Despite the changes of the last 30 years, the underrepresentation of women and the straightforward exclusion of non-white majorities, rural people and indigenous languages continue to be a salient feature of Mexico's mainstream culture and media.¹ Like the fictional assimilation of the indigenous other, women's symbolic absence seems to have provided an essential anchor for the persistent aura of the famous writer's name, which indeed continues to be a pillar of the Mexican cultural imaginary. In view of the practical difficulties that this creates for women writers, Hind is a forceful advocate of quotas in publishing and other culture and media industries. Such a position, as Hall seems to recognize, already constitutes a necessary sort of disrespect for the rules of liberal decorum. Yet Hind also reminds us that rule-breaking is not a gender-neutral performance and, perhaps unwittingly, that there is a risk in mirroring such a gesture. By calling for an abolition of the very category of 'Mexican literature', Hind opens up the question of what exactly should exist in its place. The quota solution, enclosed as it is in a conventional academic monograph with all rights reserved, turns out to be exemplary of the difficulty of 'defeating liberalism' in practice.² Like intersectional identity politics, quotas are themselves a liberal sort of disrespect that by itself does not guarantee the development of critical and creative alternatives to the gendered institutions of proprietary authorship, self-expression, originality, creativity, fixity, and copyright.

While there may be something 'untranslatable' about English liberalism, there are reasons to think that contemporary capitalism has by itself achieved the ultimate *translation* of what Gary Hall names 'liberal humanism' into Spanish as into every language that is recognized by the university. Particularly in a nativist populist conjuncture, which places the academic intellectual of the neoliberal age on the 'wrong' side of the political spectrum, and in which once again political participation is regarded as the most important justification for the intellectual's existence, capitalism seems to be leading the way by merely replacing the bad boy aesthetic

performance with a performance of academic productivity that is powered by algorithms and digitally mediated political outrage.

In *Against Abstraction* (2019), Spanish philosopher Alberto Moreiras recalls his academic past as a US-based Latin Americanist, and in the process observes that ‘an English-speaking Latin Americanist is still someone who translates and is perceived as a mere translator’. Such a perception would impose on the Latin Americanist ‘a humiliating mimesis: you must try to become them’. Happily, Moreiras is no longer bothered by such an imposition, since he is done with Latin Americanism and, more generally, with the entire Hispanic intellectual tradition, having concluded that such a tradition has produced only one dominant thought, namely, identity. From this dominant thought would spring the most commercially successful Latin Americanist trends of the time. The subalternist and decolonial turns would be so successful, for instance, because they are ‘identitarian and fundamentalists in a world that was and is complacent enough with identitarian fundamentalism’.

Such a critical perspective on the commercial success of identitarian Latin Americanism resonates with Hall’s own diagnosis of Anthropocene scholarship as ‘bourgeois theory’. The same argument could apply to the Latin American Left’s self-erecting as ‘the authentic, the proper, the identical’, and more so in as far as it is supported by the Anthropocene scholarship’s vested interest in the historic victims of capitalist civilization. One could even speculate that Hispanic America’s Catholic *criollo* humanism is finally meeting again with Anglo America’s liberal humanism through the hope of finding some sort of redemptive knowledge that can also be conventionally packaged in the traditional, copyrighted formats of the academic monograph. Like quotas, decolonial and intersectional scholarship does not by itself necessarily create new ways of doing scholarship, and may even provide new ways for academics not to care about ‘the materiality of their own ways of working and thinking’ (Hall, 2019: 12). In this particular conjuncture, a more consequential ‘lack of respect for the rules’ might involve taking a step beyond the obsolete humanism of identity politics towards the incalculable dimension of thinking that Gary Hall now terms ‘inhuman theory’.

II. Writing Obsolescence in Spanglish

Before ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’, Hall (2012; 2016) had proposed pirate radical philosophy as a theoretical orientation for a digital posthumanities. Drawing attention to the etymological roots of the word ‘pirate’, he theorized experimental, collaborative writing and publishing practices as ways of ‘teasing’ and ‘giving trouble’ to university knowledge. The acceleration of Anthropocene scholarship, which is part and parcel of the acceleration of climate breakdown, seems to have called, in more recent years, for an even more explicitly anti-bourgeois avatar of pirate radical philosophy that now bears the name of ‘inhuman theory’. Anti-bourgeois theory appears as the political dimension of inhuman theory, in that it involves a decision *not to* go along with the neoliberal pressure of instrumentally oriented academic productivity, not to ignore the precarious material conditions of intellectual work, and not to ignore the ways in which this work becomes fetishized, that is, capitalized and complicit with its own domination *in practice*. Regarding the ‘obsolescence’ of bourgeois theory in the Anthropocene, Hall extends to ‘radical scholarship’ Amitav Ghosh’s argument that the bourgeois novel’s formal limitations not only preclude treatment of climate breakdown as a literary problem, but that they also render literature complicit with it. The fact that in *Dude Lit* Hind also refers to Ghosh’s essay and extends that same argument to the bad boy aesthetic that underpins the intellectual authority of men (2019: 91) suggests to me that anti-bourgeois theory provides a critico-political space wherein to analyze and to come to terms with what Joanna Zylińska (2018) calls ‘the End of Man’. This does *not* refer to a vanquishing or humiliation of the male sex, and does not *only* refer to ‘the last gasp of a particular version of white masculinity’ (Zylińska, 2018: 46). More fundamentally, the End of Man refers to the ethical obligations presented by a potentially irreversible condition of economic and existential precarity.

Since there is no universal stance from which to fully characterize and judge everything that still happens under the umbrella of ‘liberal humanism’ and even ‘the university’ – and which includes a wide variety of scholarly activisms from the North and South – anti-bourgeois theory is in the end a radically contextual practice, made at most of pirate provocations and teasings, rather than of something that can be globally announced (and commercially packaged) as a new ‘theory’. But precisely in

the context of climate breakdown acceleration it seems to me more important than ever to ask about that which does not ultimately depend on the positive cultural particularities of any context, and that makes it possible to *translate* anti-bourgeois theory in ways that are situated, concrete, and alive, rather than abstract, irrelevant or even ‘obsolete’ from the very start. The question for me is whether this is a political question, a question for activism, or whether it is another sort of question, that is, a question for thinking that brings us once again to the starting point of this long response to ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’. The starting point was not ‘Theory’ but autobiographical writing, and the question of whether or not to write autobiography in the face of a particular kind of perplexity. At this point I would ask about the connection between *that* kind of perplexity and the issues raised by the Anthropocene, which following Ghosh and Hall, both literary and academic scholarship are formally impeded to address. Is it possible to get away from *that* sort of perplexity by ‘defeating liberalism’, or by replacing the proprietorial author and copyright with a new community ‘replete with new notions of the subject, agency, the human, and so on’ (Hall, 2019: 19)? I do not think so, and this is why I would rather go back to pirate philosophy, and to explore what it is that makes it *really* ‘radical’.

Sarah Kofman’s translation of the Greek *poros*, from which both ‘aporia’ and ‘pirate’ seem to descend, suggests to me that before and after ‘the university’ and ‘liberal humanism’, before and after English and Spanish, before and after the binaries of center and periphery, man and woman, the West and the rest, there is a more elemental question that pirate radical philosophy is about. It is not, in my view, so much the liberal environmentalist question of how to give proper credit to the non-human elements that contribute to scholarship (as opposed to filling humanist forms of scholarship with non-human ‘stuff’). It is not even the question of how to achieve more diversity and epistemic justice in academic scholarship, by taking control of the means of production and experimenting with them in an artistic way. These are important questions for sure, which demand many pirate interventions that ‘disrespect the rules’. But even before ‘giving trouble’, piracy may mean simply finding a way through obstacles, and not just any obstacles, but rather ‘a situation from which there is no way out, which is aporetic’ (Kofman, 1988: 8). And this is, I think, the question that pirate philosophy is ultimately about.

In 'Beyond Aporia', Kofman carefully distinguishes *poros* ('way') from *methodos*. By contrast with *methodos*, *poros* intervenes only 'where no trail exists', when it is a matter 'of crossing an impassable expanse of territory, an unknown, hostile and boundless world, an *apeiron*...' (1988: 10). In the Greek world the ultimate *apeiron* was the ocean, which media philosopher John Durham Peters describes, more recently, as 'the primordial medium-free zone, immune to all human attempts at fabrication' (2015: 54). For Kofman, language itself is an ocean alive with aporia, and it is the sophist who is better equipped to deal with the confusion and disorientation that such an environment breeds. Through a display of technical intelligence (*Metis*), the sophist invents *poros*, no matter what the situation might be. But since the sophist also enjoys the 'suppleness, polymorphy, duplicity, equivocity, tortuous and oblique ambiguity' (Kofman, 1988: 15) that allow them to navigate aporetic waters, they appear to us as weird, unsettling monsters. Yet no one resembles the sophist more closely than the philosopher, and it was in perplexity at the fact that 'trapping the sophist means trapping oneself' (Kofman, 1988: 16) that Plato set up a hierarchical (though ultimately false) distinction between technical intelligence and philosophical intelligence. Kofman demonstrates, however, that such a gesture was not simple or unequivocal. By making Eros the son of Poros, and defining Philosophy as the Love of wisdom, Plato also made philosophy ultimately dependent on technical intelligence. Even more importantly, in The Symposium he positioned Love as the answer to the aporia of knowledge – 'how will you look for something when you don't in the least know what it is?' (Plato 80d in Kofman, 1988). And finally, Kofman points out that the true philosophical aporia is somewhere else, in Penia, the mother of Eros: 'in her all the opposites are under erasure; she is neither masculine nor feminine, neither rich nor poor, neither a transition nor the absence of a transition, neither resourceful nor without resources' (Kofman, 1988: 26). The 'inhuman theory' avatar of pirate philosophy may look like some version of elemental media theory, but more fundamentally, I think, it is about loving engagement with the kind of intelligence that allows one to live not through knowledge, but by discovering 'stratagems, expedients, tricks, ruses, machinations, *mecharte* and *techne*...' (Kofman, 1988: 8).

Long before liberalism, it was the subject of philosophical knowledge that shaped the idea of an author. As feminist philosopher Michele Le Doeuff observed in 1977, the

subject of philosophical research traditionally ‘presented himself as the individual person, whether Aristotle, Spinoza, or Hegel. And philosophical didactics also works between two personal poles, the master ‘who knows’ and the pupil ‘who does not yet know’ (1977: 11). Although women were never favoured by such a structure, Le Doeuff argues that philosophical antifeminism became a disciplinary feature only in the nineteenth century, and not so much via liberalism as via positivism – which is, let us remember, the cultural influence that ‘defeated’ liberalism early on in Hispanic America. Philosophical antifeminism only appears to be aporetic if one buys the dogma of a superior kind of intelligence which is encapsulated in the name of a famous individual, with or without copyright. For Le Doeuff, the way out of such a seemingly aporetic situation is to invent a different form of writing. In her words, the future of the struggle of women for access to the philosophical resided in ‘a practical application of philosophy’ which was enacted by ‘a collective form of philosophical work and by a recognition of the fact that, in any case, the [philosophical] enterprise cannot be reduced to personal initiatives’ (Le Doeuff, 1977: 11). Ever since, feminist writers have been collectively exploring pirate ways of writing and publishing that are often not legally or professionally recognized, but which can be and just as often *are* (Jefferies and Kember, 2019). Hence, for example, Sarah Kember’s ‘invitalism’, which stands for a ‘scholarly writing that is not about, but out (as in, half way out) of scholarship, always in the process of reinventing it, of experimenting and institutionalising’ (2014: 114).

As for my own *translation* project, the challenge remains of devising *poros* that eschew the contextual demands for disciplinary, political and even linguistic *identity*. Pirate collaboration across languages and contexts is simply impossible without a more fundamental openness to the shared *apeiron* of existence, and without a loving relation with the singularity embodied, in each case, by technical intelligence.

I agree with infrapolitical thinker Alberto Moreiras when he says that the task of thinking today is existential, rather than political. Before and beyond any political identification there is writing itself in an ‘autographic’ rather than autobiographical sense. Autographic writing is a writing that moves, not in order to constitute a truth, but rather to seek truth ‘in the sense that it attempts to traverse the phantasm in every case, and it produces destitution in the sense that traversing the phantasm

brings us closer to the abyss of the real' (Moreiras, 2020). I would suggest that the abyss of the real is the condition of possibility of translation, in the pirate sense of Love. The question then is why we write, why we *must* write, and why writing is the only way, the only *poros* that no one can be sure of finding, until one does:

'I do not know whether writing will help me, but I have no other recourse – either for action or reaction (...) I want to save the trace, some minimal remainder of what events destroyed, so that perhaps I can let the events go for good without carrying away my entire life with them. I owe it to my sister, and I owe it to my father – my sister told me without telling me at the time of her death, and then I remembered my father told me the same thing.'

(Moreiras, *Against Abstraction*)

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Notes

¹ Hind quotes the empirical findings of Claudia Sorais-Castañeda: “The official numbers in the media in Mexico claim that among self-defined professionals, men outnumber women in every branch. The least gender equity is found in the television industry (...) Of the total economically active population in Mexico for 2006, only 0.69 percent claimed a profession in arts and entertainment; only one-fourth of those workers were women. Men outnumber women, to the tune of 87 percent, for the professions of composers, singers, musicians, actors, and dancers. The percentage drops to 65 percent for writers, critics, journalists, and editors.”

² ... in a way that resonates with Hall's diagnosis of the liberalism that underpins most radical theorists' overlooking of the material conditions of their intellectual production, Spanish philosopher José Luis Villacañas accuses Ernesto Laclau's political theory not only of having liberal assumptions, but also of having them in a melancholic way. According to Villacañas, for Laclau as for liberal philosophers more generally, politics begins with civil society. Moreover, however, as for most *Latin American* liberals perhaps, the goal for Laclau is to show how politics, through a dualistic friend-enemy logic, can turn a fragmented civil society into 'a people'. Laclauian populism turns out to be not a radical alternative to liberal philosophy, but a melancholic attachment to liberal assumptions which falters under neoliberal conditions as theorized by Foucault. There, civil society has become equivalent to the market, and government has given way to governmentality. The result is an indistinction between political and economic demands that seems to call for a new thinking of the political through the relation of subjectivity and truth. Neither Laclau nor Foucault, in Villacañas's view, manage to perform such a renewal of political theory, and their failure is due, he has suggested, to a lack of in-depth engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis.

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