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► **To cite this version:**

Gary Hall. Pluriversal Socialism – The Very Idea. Media Theory, 2021, Standard Issue, 4 (1), pp.2-30. <hal-03814585>

HAL Id: hal-03814585

<https://hal.science/hal-03814585v1>

Submitted on 14 Oct 2022

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Pluriversal Socialism – The Very Idea

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Media Theory
Vol. 5 | No. 1 | 1-30
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<http://mediatheoryjournal.org/>

Abstract

‘Pluriversal Socialism – The Very Idea’ starts from the position that politics in the West today is typically conducted in liberal humanist terms. This is the case regardless of whether those involved identify as radical democrats, socialists, communists, feminists, Greens, Marxists or anarchists.

Contemporary antihumanist and posthumanist theory is meant to offer something very different to liberal humanism. Media ecology, media archaeology, new materialism and object-oriented philosophy are all positioned as representing a shift away from anthropocentrism and a modernist epistemology based on the separation of human from nonhuman, subject from object, masculine from feminine, culture from nature, living from non-living. Instead, they champion a radically relational approach to the world that is designed to destabilise such ontological dualisms. Yet while antihumanist and posthumanist theorists may write about transgressing the boundary that divides the human from the nonhuman, when it comes to their own ways of being and doing they too often end up operating as bourgeois liberal humanists.

‘Pluriversal Socialism’ continues with my exploration (in texts such as *Pirate Philosophy* and ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’) of how we can not only write non-liberal humanist theory but actually work, act and live as non-liberal humanists too. It does so by drawing on the emphasis that is currently placed by a number of Latin Americanist theorists on pluriversal, ontological, radically relational politics (as distinct from the universal, modernist, counterhegemonic politics of most left thinkers in the Global North). In the process it addresses two important questions that have been raised recently by Arturo Escobar and Boaventura de Sousa Santos respectively: ‘Can we unlearn the liberal individual ... in a similar way that we endeavour to unlearn patriarchy, racism and heterosexism?’ And is what we need to do so ‘another theory of revolution’ or a revolution of theory?

‘Pluriversal Socialism’ is part of an ongoing discussion with Gabriela Méndez Cota and Jeremy Gilbert, who wrote responses to my 2019 essay for *Media Theory*, ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’. See Gabriela Méndez Cota, ‘Pirate Traces’ and Jeremy Gilbert, ‘Anti-Bourgeois for What?’, in *Media Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2020.

Keywords

relational, ontological, liberal, humanist, posthuman, inhuman, Escobar, decolonisation

Introduction: If We Can Unlearn Racism and Sexism Why Can't We Unlearn Liberal Humanism Too?

In 'The Meta-Crisis of Liberalism', their contribution to Michael Marder and Patricia Viera's *The Philosophical Salon*, John Milbank and Adrian Pabst insist that, while the struggle between left and right that has dominated Western politics for the past half-century has been presented as a relationship of opposing positions, they are actually two faces of the same liberalism (Milbank and Pabst, 2017). I would go a step further. I would argue that *most* politics in the West today is conducted in liberal humanist terms. And this is the case no matter whether those involved identify as liberals, socialists, conservatives, libertarians, feminists, Greens, Marxists or anarchists.

A similar case can be made with respect to antihumanist and posthumanist critical theory, fashionable variants of which in recent times have been new materialism, speculative realism, object-oriented philosophy, media archaeology and media ecology. Simplifying for the sake of economy, these theories may be positioned as differing from conventional understandings of the humanities, in that they represent a shift away from anthropocentrism and a modernist epistemology based on the distinction of human from nonhuman together with that of subject from object, masculine from feminine, culture from nature, mind from body, reason from emotion, secular from sacred, living from nonliving. Instead, they champion an approach to the world that radically destabilises such ontological dualisms. Yet while antihumanist and posthumanist theorists write about transgressing the boundary that divides the human from the nonhuman, be it animal or vegetable, environmental or technological, when it comes to how they themselves work they remain liberal humanists. Evidence their continued adherence to any number of normative concepts inherited from the humanities. They include the individualistic human author, the fixed and finished codex print book, linear thought, the long form argument, self-expression, originality, creativity and copyright. As I illustrate in 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' (2019) with regard to theoretical literature on the Anthropocene, all the mention of objects, organisms

and materials is in this respect just nonhuman filler designed to make their liberal humanist ways of being and doing appear otherwise.

‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’ emerged from my thinking for two books I’ve been working on for Open Humanities Press’s new MEDIA : ART : WRITE : NOW series, edited by Joanna Zylińska. The first, *A Stubborn Fury: How Writing Works in Elitist Britain*, was published in January 2021. It offers a critique of the bourgeois liberal humanism that dominates so much contemporary literature and culture. And, as I say, I include most antihumanist theory and what Rosi Braidotti refers to as ‘posthuman Humanities studies’ in this liberal humanism (2013: 157). Put briefly, what I’m trying to explain in this book is why it’s important for my various collaborators and I not just to write anti-bourgeois theory but actually work, act and think as anti-bourgeois theorists.

Daring us to desire something different like this is not quite as idiosyncratic as it may seem. A number of our most interesting thinkers are already endeavoring to move us in this direction. For Amitav Ghosh, writing in 2016, if we want to address the planetary climate crisis then the tradition of the bourgeois novel, emerging as it did out of the industrialisation of the 19th century, is no longer up to the task. Contemporary literary fiction not only neglects the climate emergency, it is complicit with our dissociation from it, and thus with our inability to grasp its importance. Consequently, we need to reinvent the novel, Ghosh insists. It’s *The Great Derangement*, the nonfiction book in which he makes this argument, that McKenzie Wark takes as the focus of ‘On the Obsolescence of the Bourgeois Novel in the Anthropocene’, the critical appreciation of hers I engage with in ‘Anti-bourgeois Theory’ (Ghosh, 2016; Wark, 2017). (It’s from Wark that I’ve adopted the term bourgeois.)

Olga Tokarczuk – to continue with literature for a moment – argues along similar lines in ‘The Tender Narrator’, the lecture she gave on winning the Nobel Prize in 2018. For Tokarczuk, we need a new literature ‘that would allow us to go beyond the limits of our ego’ in order to respond to the cacophony of noise generated by the polyphonic first-person narratives that are characteristic of our age (2019). By the latter she means the kind of story that ‘narrowly orbits the self of a teller who more or less directly just writes about herself and through herself.’ (No doubt this is why it can at times feel as if everyone is writing a memoir these days – in a way they are.) ‘We have determined that this type of individualized point of view, this voice from the self, is the most

natural, human and honest,' Tokarczuk continues. 'Yet it also means building an opposition between the self and the world.' Tenderness, by contrast, is for Tokarczuk a mode of 'looking that shows the world as being alive, living, interconnected, cooperating with, and codependent on itself' (2019).

The notion that we need to change our ways of being-living is clearly in the air, then. However, in maintaining that, if we actually want to be consistent with an anti- or posthumanist approach we need to renew 'serious' theory too, including its endorsement of the proprietorial author, the codex print book, originality, authenticity and copyright, I may be taking us further away from liberal humanism in 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' than even Ghosh and Tokarczuk are prepared to go at present. In both that essay and elsewhere I have endeavoured to indicate the (non-oppositional) difference of this approach from the posthumanism of Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Cary Wolfe et al by referring to it as *inhumanist* theory. The latter I characterise as theory that actually challenges the bourgeois liberal humanism that functions as a datum point for so many theories of the posthuman and nonhuman. One way in which inhumanist theory does so is by trying to accept and adopt an intra-active relation with human and nonhuman others in its very performance.

The second book I've been working on, *Masked Media* (from which a lot of what follows is taken), then details some of the alternative, anti-bourgeois, inhumanist ways of being a progressive critical theorist that my collaborators and I are exploring with initiatives such as Open Humanities Press, the Liquid Books and Living Books About Life series, *Photomediations, after.video*, the Mandela27 DIY Exhibition, Public Library: *Memory of the World*, the Centre for Postdigital Cultures, Partisan Social Club, the Radical Open Access Collective, Scholarled, COPIM (Community-led Open Publication Infrastructures for Monographs) and Pirate Care. I've provided an extensive list to emphasise our work is not just critical, at least if we adhere to the currently fashionable (yet for me seriously mistaken) reading of the term that associates it with negation, refusal and rejection. Our work is also constructive and affirmative. Among other things it's about creating new institutions, organisations and infrastructures. (Not that I'm implying instances of theory that don't generate new initiatives *are* only negative. What I do want to suggest though is that, for my

collaborators and I, anti-bourgeois theory involves building, developing, maintaining and repairing as much as authoring.)¹

In this essay, written in part as a reply to Gabriela Méndez Cota's and Jeremy Gilbert's thoughtful and challenging responses to 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' which were published in *Media Theory* as 'Pirate Traces' and 'Anti-Bourgeois for What?', I want to develop this critique of both Western politics and serious theory as different aspects of liberal humanism (Méndez Cota, 2020; Gilbert, 2020). For the answer to the question of why my collaborators and I want not only to write anti-bourgeois theory but also work, act and think in terms of it is quite simple. We want to demonstrate how our principles of being and doing can be reimaged in order to help foster a progressive transformation toward a noncapitalist, nonracist, nonheteropatriarchal *inhuman* future. I appreciate that the emphasis on the inhuman here is somewhat counter-intuitive. But unless we can unthink and unlearn liberal humanism, we risk perpetuating the kind of unjust and unequal culture with which many of us are all too familiar. As 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' shows with regard to how literature works in contemporary Britain, it's a culture addicted to the liberal worldview of healthy, privileged, middle-class white men, to the exclusion of more nonconformist and radically inventive thought, including that of working-class, LGBTQIAP+, Black and Global Majority writers.

What Do We Need, Another Theory of Revolution or a Revolution of Theory?

Given what I've said about unlearning liberal humanism, it would be interesting to explore the extent to which this argument regarding anti-bourgeois and inhumanist theory can be extended to the emphasis that is currently being placed on what, for shorthand, can be called pluriversal, ontological, radically relational politics (as distinct from universal, modernist-liberal, counterhegemonic politics) by a number of English-speaking Latin Americanist theorists. I can certainly imagine a provocative reading of this kind being developed with respect to Arturo Escobar's fascinating recent book *Pluriversal Politics* (2020). As he makes clear in the preface to the English version, Escobar locates pluriversal politics at the level at which the World Social Forum slogan 'Another world is possible' has been 'radically pluralized' by social movements

‘mobilizing against large-scale extractive operations in defence of their territories as veritable worlds where life is lived according to principles that differ significantly from that of the global juggernauts unleashed on them’ (2020: ix). The slogan has become, in effect, *another multiple world is possible*, ‘because both another real and another possible are possible’ (ix). (Hence the title of the book’s Spanish-language edition: *Another Possible is Possible*.) It’s in the context of this break with the accepted thinking about the real and the possible that Escobar builds on Audre Lorde’s infamous insistence that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (Lorde, 2018). Counterhegemonic political strategies can make use of the master’s ‘hegemonic tools’, he concedes, to ‘push radical demands forward, to the system’s breaking point, if possible’ (Escobar, 2020: xviii). (Escobar provides as an example the modernist practice of claiming legal rights, which he sees as having been ably employed by indigenous peoples. However, his account of the strategic potential of counterhegemonic politics also brings to mind Gilbert’s defence of those practitioners of Marxism who would maintain there are perfectly legitimate reasons for operating in a manner that provides ‘left-wing publishers with income-streams’ and makes use of the ‘bourgeois apparatus of celebrity and elite scholarship to promote radical ideas’ – and who do so, contrary to Gilbert, even when other means *are* available [2020: 184].)² Yet while acknowledging left, masculinist, counterhegemonic forms of politics can be effective, there’s also something conservative about them for Escobar. He considers such politics to be particularly counterproductive when it comes to their relation to pluriversal politics, in that ‘they ‘reproduce and strengthen, rather than undermine’, the modernist ontological separation between human and nonhuman, subject and object, culture and nature from which they are derived (Escobar, 2020: xv). ‘This is especially the case with liberal forms’, he writes (xv). Instead, Escobar wants to articulate an anticapitalist, antiracist, antiheteropatriarchal approach that goes further than the dominant ontologies. It requires a post-Enlightenment framing that ‘advances the principles of interdependence and relationality’ where everything is messily entwined with everything else, and that therefore ‘cannot be easily accommodated within actually existing Left discourses’ (xix).

Their willingness to go beyond left, masculinist, counterhegemonic politics is one of the reasons I find the work of a number of Latin Americanist scholars (including some of those Méndez Cota references) so compelling. I’m thinking of Escobar, Boaventura

de Sousa Santos, Maria Lugones, Alberto Moreiras and Gareth Williams, among others. For many of them, too, modernist-left political thinkers in the epistemological Global North are liberals really. In *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, de Sousa Santos goes so far as to maintain that Eurocentric and Westerncentric concepts such as socialism and even democracy have ‘exhausted’ much of their ‘mobilizing efficacy’ (2018: 12). As far as he is concerned, we have to move past leftist politics, an alternative modernity and what he refers to as ‘variations of the same critical thinking’ (viii). It’s not alternatives that are necessary but ‘rather an alternative thinking of alternatives’ (viii). Or as he puts it in a play on the same theme, what we need is not yet another theory of resistance and revolution to add to those already supplied by Marxist critics over the course of the 20th century. What we need is to ‘revolutionise theory’ (ix).

It’s an alternative thinking of alternatives that would not itself be reducible to ontological dualisms; nor to an either/or strategy of pluriversal, ontological, relational politics vs. universal, modernist, counterhegemonic politics. To return to Escobar, his ‘pluriversal politics itself involves an entanglement of forms, inhabiting a spectrum from the radically relational to the modernist liberal’ that ‘we are all, ineluctably, part of’ (2020: xvii). Escobar positions ‘many activists and groups’, for example, as moving ‘in and out of’ the three kinds of politics he outlines: ‘standard biopolitical liberal forms... such as those of most neoliberal governments’ (xv); ‘political strategies and designs *for social justice*’ associated with ‘human rights (including gender, sexual, and ethnic diversity), environmental justice, the reduction of inequality, direct alliances with social movements’ (xvi); and ‘pluriversal politics proper, or political strategies and designs *for pluriversal transitions*’ (xvi). The practice of these activists can thus be understood as ‘modernist, Left and pluriversal at the same time’ (xvi). Nevertheless, the goal is to cultivate ‘ourselves as theorists and practitioners of multiple possibles’, even as we switch between these different political strategies as appropriate. It’s to ‘actively unlearn the ontologies of separation and a single real that shape our bodies and worlds’, and to discover in their place the ‘practices of resubjectivation’ that are required for ‘actively and effectively desiring nonpatriarchal, noncapitalist, and deeply relational modes of being, knowing, and doing’ (xx-xxi). Hence his raising of the question I took for the previous section’s title: ‘Can we unlearn the liberal individual ... in a similar way that we endeavour to unlearn patriarchy, racism and heterosexism?’ (xxxix).

All the same, I can't help thinking of the warning Escobar provides when he emphasises how:

we all need to be mindful of the multiple ways in which our actions depend on, and often reinforce, the metaphysical infrastructure of the current dominant systems, including its universal constructs and objectifying relations, its anthropocentrism, secularism, and Eurocentrism, and its colonialist hierarchical classifications in terms of race, gender, and sexuality.

.... most worlds live under ontological occupation. Such occupation is effected through the categories and hierarchical classifications historically deployed by governments, corporations, organized religions, and the academy as the main purveyors of a dominant onto-epistemic structure' (Escobar, 2020: xxxi).

What are the implications of this warning for the manner in which Escobar cultivates himself as a theorist and practitioner? How is his emphasis on pluriversal, ontological, relational politics played out with respect to his own actions? After all, in keeping with the conservative manner of working that in 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' I associate with most radical theorists and philosophers today, *Pluriversal Politics* is written and presented very much as if it is the personal expression of an autonomous individual who lives and works in isolation from all human and nonhuman others, and who has the moral and legal right to be recognised as its original author. It is then turned into a commodity by a reputable publisher (Duke University Press in the case of the book's English version), in the form of a materially conventional book that can be purchased at a price according to a property regime presided over by the market philosophy of late capitalism. It's a system that ensures ideas, concepts, indeed whole philosophies and worldviews, continue to be attributed to a relatively small number of high profile and well-resourced theorists as *theirs*, as part of their unique intellectual trademarks. With *Pluriversal Politics* is Escobar producing an alternative thinking of alternatives, then, or is he reproducing 'the world as we know it', utilising the 'same categories by which we are destroying it' (2020: 5, 6)?

Returning to the idea that pluriversal politics itself involves an entanglement of forms, an argument can be made that, when it comes to his book *Pluriversal Politics*, Escobar is himself operating in terms of leftist politics and an alternative modernity. His doing so can be justified on the grounds that, at the very least, modernist-leftist politics create less inimical conditions for fostering material and ‘ontological politics toward the pluriverse’ than does neoliberalism (2020: x). (Something similar can be said of European critical theory, including that which Gilbert identifies as continuing in the tradition of those Parisian thinkers who were formed by the radical democratic, anticapitalist and antiauthoritarian politics of the 1960s and 70s.) In short, it can be claimed that Escobar, like ‘many social movements’, is in practice blurring the ‘boundaries between counterhegemonic and ontological politics’ with regard to his own mode of acting and working as a theorist (2020: xviii). Still, the question remains: with *Pluriversal Politics* is he, too, not using the master’s tools in continuing to conform to Westerncentric (and masculinist) concepts and classifications inherited from the modern, the liberal and the humanities such as the author and the book, originality and copyright? To recast Méndez Cota’s words, does an anticapitalist, antiracist, antiheteropatriarchal approach that goes beyond the current dominant, universal ontologies and metaphysical infrastructure also call for a ‘*real* interruption’ to – and non-macho-bad-boy lack of respect for – *his* ‘academic normality’ (Méndez Cota, 2020: 167)?

Intriguingly, it’s a direction Escobar himself appears to be pointing in when he asks:

What do we do if we arrive at the conclusion that everything that surrounds us – institutions, governments, religions, academies, even the innermost aspects of our beings – has been so thoroughly colonized by modernity as to make any counterhegemonic use of modernist tools practically inoperative and counterproductive? ... Would these growing realizations ... not lead us to conclude that the time for a radical rupture and departure from those dominant worlds has arrived? This would seem to me a perfectly valid inference... (Escobar, 2020: xxii).

Presumably the answer to the last question is yes, otherwise only the ‘most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable’, to quote Lorde once again (2018: 17). Yet if this is a perfectly valid inference, the next question is: what would the

associated ‘prefigurative’ practices of resubjection, of unlearning the liberal individual, actually be (Escobar, 2020: x)? What would these different ways of being a theorist look like? What guises might they take?

Missing Communities

I’m going to postpone developing such a *piratical* reading of the attempt of theorists such as Escobar and de Sousa Santos to reimagine politics for and from Latin America until I have time to produce a singular analysis. As I make clear in ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’, however, I’m conscious the argument I’m making nevertheless raises a number of issues for *my own* way of operating as a theorist in the epistemological Global North. After all, I’m interrogating our hard-to-relinquish liberal humanist principles of being, knowing and doing. Isn’t it somewhat contradictory, then, to act as if there is a pre-established community of readers out there for a text such as this one (beyond the relative few who care about this kind of thing); a community who are only waiting for me to nudge them into accepting the consequences of such thinking for our current modes of being-with? In disrupting ideas of the rational human individual, the unique author, the real name, the single-voiced narrative and so forth, my work is intended rather to test and cause trouble for many of those taken-for-granted categories and hierarchical classifications that could ordinarily be used to mobilise a large audience around it, be it made up of academics or those ‘outside the social elite’ such as ‘working class people’ (Gilbert, 2020: 186). This is why I conceive the current potential audience for it more in terms of *coming communities* or *missing communities* (Hall, 2019; 2016b). It’s also why I’m interested in experimenting with new possibilities for being-living as a theorist that involve not just *representing* the world but *performatively inter-acting* with, in and as part of it too.

Operating in this fashion is about doing things that may indeed appear improper, odd, eccentric and hard to understand at times. I don’t want to address any of this by means of my autobiography, for instance, as Didier Eribon and Édouard Louis do with theirs in *Returning to Reims* and *The End of Eddy* (Eribon, 2013; Louis, 2017). Or as Gilbert appears to be encouraging me to do with his references to our common history studying Critical Theory at Sussex University in the late 1980s. Or even as Méndez Cota does when she recounts my 2019 visit to Mexico and being asked to write her

commentary on ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’ after both the ‘end of the world of academic normality’ brought about by the coronavirus pandemic and the passing of her close friend, the translator Pilar Vázquez (Méndez Cota, 2020: 167). Not that my autobiography is entirely absent from ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’, as Gilbert and Méndez Cota both signal. My father died in April 2018, and I attended the event with Eribon and Louis that opens the essay in the summer of that year. Yet I must admit it wasn’t until I read Méndez Cota’s response that I made the connection between my father dying and my writing so soon afterwards about Eribon returning to Reims after the death of his father. Thanks to her I can see Eribon and Louis provided me with a means of working through some of that without resorting to writing autobiography or memoir myself – which is something I don’t want to do, as I say. To be sure, as other forms of authority and legitimacy such as those provided by experts and the book are breaking down, so they are being replaced by ourselves and our own identities and biographies. In contrast to the response of, say, Louis (2018) to the *gilets jaunes*, however, I’ve said hardly anything in my work about my own backstory (until now that is). No personal anecdotes about Sunderland, the north of England, the ‘left behind’, ‘red wall’ voters, and about *knowing these people* in an attempt to make me appear more authentic.

At the same time, for all it means I’m flying in the face of the myth that humans are hardwired to respond to stories, especially those that engage them personally, I wouldn’t want to give the impression that my knowledge is not situated: that I’m endeavouring to operate according to what Donna Haraway, building on a long history of feminist critique, refers to as the ‘god trick’. The latter is a ruse by means of which a researcher can somehow leap out of their marked body and act as if they speak from an uncontestable, objective, transcendent position – ‘from above, from nowhere’, as it were (Haraway, 1988: 589). (It’s a trick that’s far easier to pull off if your body is unmarked because you are white, male, middle class, straight and cis. Otherwise, you’re likely to find your body is already marked for you.) I’ve actually taken great care to situate the historical and cultural specificity of my own point of view, my own way of life, my own ways of working and thinking (to the extent ‘my own’ still makes sense given what I’ve written about Escobar). Yet just as Jacques Derrida in his debate over speech acts with John Searle shows that context can never be fully exhausted, so knowledge can never be fully situated (Derrida, 1988). There are ways of self-critically

situating and there are ways of self-critically situating, and a politico-ethical decision has to be taken in each case (including as to whether or not to explicitly situate your knowledge – or write autobiography). For me, what politics is, what it is to be political, is not something that can necessarily be calculated in advance of intellectual questioning and contestation: as automatically, by default, having to do with class, race, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, faith, education, privilege – or indeed socialism, communism and radical democracy, for that matter.

Let me also stress: this is not a contemporary British version of that part of American liberalism Gilbert describes as having long ‘combined a penchant for radical relativism with a tendency towards political agnosticism (or at least a discursive style that rarely did anything so gauche as to declare an explicit political commitment)’ (Gilbert, 2020: 183). I’m not a relativist, and most assuredly not in the sense of arguing that things have subjective value only relative to the perception of the individual. Nor is mine an avant-gardism that can be inserted into a ‘basically anti-political tradition of mannered liberalism’ (Gilbert, 2020: 183). As I wrote regarding the political nearly two decades ago now:

I’m not arguing against making decisions and choices about acting this way rather than that, that the need to hesitate and think should be used as an excuse for inaction and for not making a decision; or against taking a position and maintaining that one particular social, political or ethical issue is more urgent at a given moment than another. And I’m certainly not claiming that ... we should no longer attempt to ‘reach’ the ‘public sphere’ or align ourselves with historical and social movements, and that, rather than trying to understand and intervene in matters of policy and public and political debate, we should be content with operating within the confines of our institution and profession. We still have to be ‘political’ (Hall, 2004).

What I am saying is that to be political we also have to be prepared to put our ‘conceptions of politics at risk’, along with the grounds and reasons they’re based on: ‘of questioning and critiquing and experimenting with them’ (Hall, 2004). Often, we are loath to do so for what are perfectly understandable reasons. We are loath to do so because if we don’t foreclose the question of politics, then that which we are trying

to produce through this foreclosure, which is the certainty of politics and of our identities as political – that to be properly political is to make explicit declarations in the name of socialism, say – are vulnerable to challenge and change. Yet this openness to uncertainty, and with it to the unknown, the unexpected, the unpredictable and thus the future, is an important part of what it means to be political for me.

I realise taking the strategic decision not to declare what it is that I'm *for* prior to intellectual interrogation risks leaving a space that others can fill; and that such an absence may indeed on occasion help the 'reproduction of hegemonic liberalism' (Gilbert, 2020: 186). This is why I do at times go to great lengths to articulate my politics. It's what I'm doing here in fact, in my own awkward, indirect way. One of the political decisions I've often made in my work, for instance, is to refuse to limit my location and situate my theory in its historical, social and cultural context by using my autobiography; and what's more to make it difficult for others to do so using my autobiography as well (although it's clearly still possible, as the responses of Méndez Cota and Gilbert to 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' indicate). It's not just that, as Haraway remarks, we are 'not immediately present to ourselves', that 'self-identity is a bad visual system' (1988: 585). It's also that I don't want to try to signify a philosophy by means of who I am. My personal (life) is not my political (statement).

By refusing to overtly acknowledge my own empirical body, identity and positionality in this fashion I appreciate there is a chance of upsetting some people; that not everyone can afford to do this, be it for cultural, economic or professional reasons. Nevertheless, if I'm intent on rethinking our hegemonic, Westerncentric, modernist-liberal ways of knowing and being and their self-evident orthodoxy around not only *which* actors get to create, publish and disseminate knowledge today, but *how* they do so, then this a chance I sometimes have to take. I'm convinced there needs to be space to try something different like this (even if there's not just one conceivable route out of the situation).

The main reason I'm interested in experimenting with new possibilities for being-living as a theorist that involve not only representing the world but performatively interacting with it too, however, is because, rather than attempting to speak about or for pre-established communities, it seems to me that, in the epistemological Global North at least, we have to focus more on creating the new contexts, the new cultures, the new

relationships out of which such missing communities can develop. This is my argument in ‘Anti-Bourgeois Theory’: that as theorists we need to be supple, polymorphous and duplicitous enough to be able to open ourselves to a future in which we *don’t* necessarily conform to the dominant discourse network and its common-sense notions of the human subject, virtuoso author, the proper name and the authoritative, finalised, stable object. To borrow Méndez Cota’s words, we need to be prepared to intervene “‘where no trail exists’, when it is a matter ‘of crossing ... an unknown, hostile and boundless world, an *apeiron*’” (Kofman, 1988: 10, in Méndez Cota, 2020: 176), by acting as what I refer to – this time using a term taken from Clarice Lispector (2014: 10) – as ‘weird monsters’.

Antipolitics, Hyperpolitics, Infrapolitics

Acting as monsters in order to help generate the conditions in which such missing communities might emerge is what I and my collaborators Janneke Adema, Sigi Jöttkandt, David Ottina, Joanna Zylinska and others have been doing for some time now with projects such as Open Humanities Press, *Living Books About Life* and *Photomediations*. These initiatives are performative in that they’re involved not just in representing (or re-presenting) the world, as I say: they’re also involved in intra-acting with it in order to *do things* within and as part of the world. As Chantal Mouffe emphasises, the striated nature of the ‘globalized space’, in which there is a multiplicity of ‘sites where relations of power are articulated in specific local, regional and national configurations’, means that what is required is a ‘variety of strategies’ and resistances (2005: 114). This is what we are endeavouring to provide with our different projects: a variety of situated strategies and resistances. And they include some intra-actions that are neither simply left, modernist nor counterhegemonic but are closer to the pluriversal, ontological, deeply relational politics of Escobar (which, as we know, includes the modernist, left and pluriversal at the same time).

Our projects thus comprise a diverse range of interventions that are addressing particular issues across and between multiple different locations: forms of radically contextual intervention that are associated not just with the university and the practices of theorists, but where needs be with the knowledges, cultures and subjectivities of those working in the fields of art, activism, urbanism, education, literature, business,

politics, technology and the media. As singular projects they unfold according to different scales and life spans, with some being more obviously successful than others – depending on your criteria of success, of course. Some of our initiatives are quite open to the risk of failing, regarding it merely as a price to be paid in order to produce work that is exploratory and experimental rather than monumental and impregnable. Some are short-lived by design. Others deliberately refuse to grow either by increasing their output or by expanding their community and its modes of production and dissemination, preferring to *nonscale* as it might be characterised following Anna Tsing – what my colleague Janneke Adema has referred to as scaling small (Tsing, 2015; Adema and Moore, 2021). Some achieve this by opening themselves to potentially transformative (and conflictual) relationships with a multiplicity of groups and communities in different parts of the world through collaborative co-creation and custodianship. Others do so by making their tools, content and infrastructure deliberately available to being (more or less violently) appropriated, copied, repurposed, remixed, built upon, modified, distributed and ‘pirated’ by a diverse range of actors and institutions. Some even do both.

Our anti-bourgeois theory therefore does not try to conform to a preset idea of what an academic paper should look like. Our theory-performances might not even take the form of a piece of writing at all – not even a ‘different form of writing’ (Méndez Cota, 2020: 177). They can be a business, a collective or an institutional research centre, and as I say can on occasion (under the influence of feminism) involve building, developing, maintaining, caring, guiding, supporting, encouraging or inspiring as much if not more than authoring. It depends on what is most appropriate to the task in hand: different issue, different context, different addressee, different theory-performance.

As I emphasised in the first issue of *Media Theory* in a text called ‘The Inhumanist Manifesto’, one of the things that unites the various performative media initiatives of my collaborators and I is a desire to generate (and protect) unconditional spaces for experimenting with politics and the political beyond the ways in which they have traditionally been conceived – what I refer to as the ‘hyper-political’. The political here is thus not only about trying to bring about the kind of results and affects that can be predicted ahead of time. The political also has to be conceived and developed in relation to specific practices, in particular contingent conditions and environments, by

taking the necessary decisions and otherwise being open to doing things that are uncertain and unpredictable (Hall, 2017; 2008).

While I do consider myself to be part of the left, then, I don't necessarily rush to make this case in the abstract, often preferring to work out my politics in specific situations and contexts. All of which leads to another answer I might give to Gilbert's question concerning not what I am against but what am I for? In 'Anti-Bourgeois for What?', Gilbert projects one version of the history of radical theory on to me, seeing it as a formation from which much of my work has 'historically proceeded' (2020: 182). And it's true that as a postgraduate student at Sussex I studied with Rachel Bowlby, Homi K. Bhabha and Geoffrey Bennington. It's also true that at that time the three were editors of the *Oxford Literary Review*, which had people such as J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom on its Honorary Committee, all of them associated with 'liberal' literature departments in elite American universities including Yale. As much as it has become common for certain elements of the British left to offer a narrative of this kind when it comes to French theory of the 1970s and 80s, a narrative in which the latter is never Marxist, socialist or political enough, I'm not sure the story Gilbert recounts is my history, though. If it is, it's only one possible version of it. There are definitely other *reals*. The origins of my interest in radical theory could just as easily be traced back to the post-punk British music press of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Like many of my generation I was reading the *New Musical Express* long before I was allowed anywhere near a university (see Reynolds, 2009). (I suppose it could always be argued that if people hadn't been reading Barthes and Kristeva at Yale in the 70s and 80s, music journalists such as Paul Morley and Ian Penman wouldn't have been referring to them then, either.) Similarly, while Gilbert relates my thinking to a 'formally conservative French intellectual culture that has historically placed a high value on "philosophy"', others have located it in the European tradition of anticapitalist, leftist or communist engagement with the politics of the internet with which the likes of Michel Bauwens and Dmytri Kleiner are associated (2020: 182). (To be fair Gilbert does see a clear continuity between my work and a 'certain tradition of politically radical experimentalism' that includes elements of autonomous Marxism and the 'collective writing and theorising ... of groups like the Midnight Notes collective' [185].) From this point of view the theory-performances of my collaborators and I are held as connecting with a multiplicity of wider movements that are indeed

‘challenging relations of property and individuality in other spheres and on other scales’ (185): those to do with radical open access, FLOSS, p2p filesharing, copyfarleft, anti-copyright, pro-piracy and the commons; as well as activities involved with the shift from representative to direct, participatory forms of democracy and toward more horizontal, decentralised ways of organising that can be traced at least as far back as the 1999 anti-capitalist WTO demonstrations in Seattle, but which has been evident more recently in the Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter protests. Yet as I make clear in *Pirate Philosophy* – this time with regard to those uprisings that commenced with the Tunisian revolution of 2010: the Arab Spring, Occupy and so forth – even if such a connection can be made, I’m working more ‘in terms of’ these wider movements, as Michel Foucault has it, than *for* or *with* them. To repeat Merleau-Ponty’s helpful phrase one more time, for me it’s crucial not to surrender critical thinking to immediate political discourses and so elude “the trap of the event” (Foucault, 1988: 263; Merleau-Ponty, 1994, cited in Brown, 2001: 43; Hall, 2016a: xiii).

Nevertheless, projects such as *Culture Machine*, Scholarled and COPIM are all involved with the practical material constitution of institutions and ‘forms of cultural engagement’ that do indeed ‘enable communities of people outside the social elite both to produce knowledge and to acquire different kinds of education’ (Gilbert, 2020: 186). As I put it in a recent edited collection on *Aesthetics of the Commons* (to which Gilbert also contributed): ‘One of the motivations behind our production of free, radical open access or “pirate” resources and infrastructures is to ... make it possible for *chains of equivalence* to be established between our projects and a diversity of other struggles locally, nationally and internationally’ (Hall, 2021b: 174). (Among the specific struggles I mention are those for municipal socialism, platform cooperativism, a Green New Deal and Unconditional Basic Income.) A further impetus is ‘to encourage other initiatives and movements around the world by showing what can be achieved – how things might look if the transformed habits of being and doing’ my collaborators and I are experimenting with were to be accepted (2021b: 174). At the same time, seeing our audience more in terms of a missing public or community means we don’t really have a ready-made political constituency we’re doing this for, be it made up of academic intellectuals, social movement activists, the working class, the masses or the multitude.

Could it be that the questions Gilbert really wants to ask me are not so much what am I for, but why do I not want what he wants? Why do I not want *his* politics? And what might be wrong with that politics if I do not want it? In which case I should make it clear I do share a lot of Gilbert's political beliefs. I even have a long history of explicit engagement with Marxism, the Marxist tradition and with Marxist thinkers including Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Jodi Dean, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri that stretches back at least as far as 2002 and my first book, *Culture in Bits*. As I said before, we still have to be political.

If I'm not a liberal, Gilbert asks, then why do I not do anything so gauche as declare an explicit political commitment? If I don't, it's because I'm convinced that to assert what politics is in advance of intellectual inquiry is to risk being nonpolitical, even antipolitical. The last thing that would be understood by such a precritical declaration would be politics. Instead, politics would be placed in a transcendental position. It would be the one thing that needs to be known, since it constitutes the criteria against which everything else is judged, including whether the work of someone such as myself is political or not. But politics at the same time would be the one thing that could not be known. For the one thing that can't be judged according to any transcendently elevated criterion is of course that criterion itself.

I would even go so far as to say that attempts to adhere to the idea that to be political is to announce an explicit commitment to a predefined socialism, communism or radical democracy in many cases fail to live up to their own understanding of politics. They constitute a refusal to remain open to the actual specificities of the political and historical conjuncture, and thus to the fact that the struggles for socialism, communism and radical democracy are not universal and ahistorical but radically contingent. They are particular kinds of struggle that emerge and develop in particular historical, social and cultural conjunctures – conjunctures that may of course change, thus requiring the nature of political struggle to change. In other words – and to answer Gilbert's question as to whether texts such as 'Anti-Bourgeois Theory' are a contribution to socialist thought, and if not why not? (Gilbert, 2020: 184) – for me to affirm that I am always and everywhere for *socialism* would be to perform a version of the god trick. It would be to act as if I were somehow speaking from a transcendental position *above*

history, society and culture. Socialism in such a scenario would function as a foreclosed political fetish; one that is both beyond question and unconditionally applicable.

I recognise the appeal of making an explicit commitment to a specific, single politics. After all, it's only by marginalising the question of politics that we can maintain the certainty of both our politics and our identities as *authentically political*. There's a definite attraction to producing such a foreclosure. However, morally coming out for socialism like this would eliminate the very antagonism and dissent that many thinkers on the left, Jodi Dean and Chantal Mouffe included, would argue is actually required for politics. Are there not other, alternative, conflicting forms of struggle that are difficult to comprehend and even detect according to the terms in which politics is usually understood; that 'are very different from what we think they are', as de Sousa Santos has it, precisely because they are involved in challenging the preconceived, pre-authorised criteria of what it is to be political. He provides as an example the 'struggle of the social movements and the daily struggles of the people that have to survive in hostile contexts in an exclusionary society. They are the silent struggles', he writes. 'This is very clear for migrant communities in our societies when they know that open confrontation with the legal powers will mean deportation, so they cannot afford active resistance. They prefer passive resistance.' De Sousa Santos proceeds to make the important point that, on occasion, 'things that do not seem to move are in fact moving, but we do not have the instruments to understand it' (2016: 25). This is why, when it comes to politics, I'm convinced on the one hand that we have to be political; and on the other that we have to remain open to possibilities for politics and for being political other than those associated with socialism (or communism, radical democracy, organised party politics, collective unions, social movements and counterhegemonic struggle). Included in the latter are 'means and resources for politics and for being political that may not be regarded as such if politics and the political are to be recognised only with the help of the most easy-to-identify signs and labels' (Hall, 2004). Politics in this respect is closer to (but not the same as) that which Méndez Cota points toward with her references to the infrapolitics of Alberto Moreiras. 'The truth is that one discovers, without setting out to do so, that real politics ... is not where it says it is, or rarely', Moreiras affirms in a conversation on infrapolitics:

It is more common to find that the most radical democrat, as soon as one makes an effort to read his texts, ends up revealing, more or less naïvely, his intrinsic despotism, that the fiercest subalternist reveals himself as the perfect policeman, or that the noblest feminist could be understood as an extraordinary case of corrupt opportunism (Moreiras, 2020: 189).

Hopefully, all this explains why, when it comes to considering how to bring ‘an end to the reign of copyright, or bourgeois liberalism, or the public-school educated philistines that govern English cultural institutions’ (Gilbert, 2020: 184), I am receptive not only to the work of avowed Marxist thinkers: Gilbert mentions among others Brecht, Bakhtin, Lukács, McCabe, Anderson and Nairn. The refusal to foreclose the question of politics or eliminate its emergent, unknowable, incalculable dimensions means I am also interested in the ideas of theorists belonging to the very philosophical tradition of Foucault, Deleuze, Kofman *et al* Gilbert says he has grown weary of because their key texts, for him, do not name or formulate an objective ‘that is explicitly socialist and explicitly oriented towards the general aim of building collectivist, egalitarian and libertarian alternatives to capitalist society’ (Gilbert, 2020: 185). Theory provides one sphere in which our analytical categories and conceptual frameworks regarding what politics is and what it is to be political can be put to the test. Certainly, the rigorous intellectual interrogation and radicalisation of politics is a large part of what initially attracted me to the French theorists Gilbert refers to – and subsequently to others who are Italian, German, Belgian, Portuguese, Spanish, Mexican, Colombian...

Even if I was to say I am working toward socialism, I can’t help wondering, what kind of socialism should it be? (The only version Gilbert refers to specifically in ‘Anti-Bourgeois for What?’ is ‘libertarian socialism’ (2020: 185).) And more than that, is socialism still the best term to use to designate the horizon of radical, emancipatory, anticapitalist politics, including ‘a form of society ... wherein the social relations that produce phenomena such as copyright have been transformed beyond recognition? Is it really ‘the only long-term goal’ that has a chance to bring this to an end (Gilbert, 2020: 184)? On the face of it this would appear a rather unimaginative, not to say conservative, position to take. (I’m referring to the sense Michael Oakeshott gives to the term when he writes that ‘To be conservative ... is to prefer the familiar to the

unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried' [Oakeshott, 1962: 168–196].) For me, placing the building of collectivist and egalitarian alternatives to capitalist society under the banner of 'socialism' risks projecting into the future too many preprogrammed ideas from the past. An insistence on (always) doing so in the name of socialism would discourage us from endeavouring to devise new, potentially strange and surprising possibilities for political action and resistance; possibilities that may be better able to take account of the difference and specificity of the contemporary conjuncture. At the very least, it might stop us from attempting to invent an alternative thinking of alternative politics; a thinking that, unlike most radical political theories in the epistemological Global North, is *not* ultimately underpinned by (neo)liberal humanism (including its ideas of the possessive individual, for-profit income streams, copyright, and the bourgeois apparatus of celebrity and elite scholarship). We need to ask: have the existing forms of socialism indeed lost too much of their *mobilising efficacy* in many settings around the world to be of meaningful assistance when it comes to articulating an anticapitalist, antiracist, antiheteropatriarchal approach that goes further than the dominant ontologies 'that are an integral part of most, if not all, forms of oppression in the world today' (Escobar, 2020: xxi)? Or, with the help of Escobar, de Sousa Santos and others, can we imagine renewed conceptions of socialist politics that are not (or not only) Westerncentric, hegemonic or modernist-liberal? Radically relational forms of socialism perhaps that *can* bring an end to the reign of bourgeois liberalism along with what Méndez Cota refers to as the 'gendered institutions' (Méndez Cota, 2020: 172) of the proprietorial author, the immutable book, originality, creativity, self-expression, copyright and so on. Can socialism accommodate such an alternative, nondualist, nonseperablist ontological framing, even if it is difficult for it to do? Or do we have to reinvent socialism? Transform it out of recognition by imagining it differently? Even move beyond socialism altogether?

Conclusion: Masked Media

Let me conclude by spiralling back to an issue Méndez Cota raises (although it's one I've never really ceased to address). It concerns the 'place of subjectivity – in a sense that is actually opposite to "liberal humanism" – within "inhuman theory"' (2020: 168). To be clear: when I write 'I' here and in texts such as 'Anti-bourgeois Theory', I'm not referring to myself in a naïve sense – as if, contrary to everything I've said, I'm still

operating according to the cult of personality and its model of the controlling author as romantic or modernist genius. Nor have I endeavoured to somehow deindividuate the biographical liberal humanist subject simply by writing collectively (even if I have done so on occasion, just as I have also used the first-person plural ‘we’). If late capitalism has led us to act as hypercompetitive microentrepreneurs of our own selves, it has also embraced our working together toward social goals. There is nothing inherently politically progressive about collectivity, then (or about being part of a wider movement). The theory-performances I have referred to (the Liquid Books and Living Books About Life series, *after.video* and so on) should rather be understood as emerging from my ongoing intra-actions with a diversity of actors, institutions and communities. They can best be thought of as promoting the development of a rather different form of being-with that comprises neither simply singularities nor pluralities.

While taking care to avoid adhering too readily to the concept of the virtuoso free-standing author, I have also tried to forestall a limit and a unity being imposed on these theory-performances by means of the concept of the ‘work’. This is a danger Foucault warns us of in ‘What Is an Author?’ (1984). It’s one of the reasons why, instead of distinguishing my anti-bourgeois or inhumanist theory (or pirate philosophy, if you prefer, as Méndez Cota clearly does) from that of supposedly rival theorists, as if I am engaged in a struggle for intellectual dominance over who is right, I often perform it by working intra-actively *with* others: not just Adema, Jottkandt, Ottina, Zylinska et al and communities such as Open Humanities Press and the Radical Open Access Collective. There is also Tom McCarthy in *A Stubborn Fury*; Bernard Stiegler and Rosi Braidotti in *Pirate Philosophy*; not to mention the Marxism of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *New Cultural Studies* (2006); and that of Jodi Dean in *Digitize This Book!* (2008); along with my loving engagement with Angela McRobbie and Raymond Williams in *Culture in Bits* (including the latter’s work for the Workers’ Education Association). What results are performances of theory that are neither simply mine nor theirs; performances in which it is not always easy to determine where the thought of these others ends and mine begins. (This is why I can’t give a straightforward answer to Gilbert’s rather modernist question: how does my critique of ‘bourgeois elite culture and its endemic philistinism’ compare to that of Lukács [Gilbert, 2020: 184-185]?)

Operating actively to unlearn the ontologies of separation like this is designed to push back against the privileging of the singular possessive individual and their discrete oeuvre, along with the associated intellectual star system and idea of the monumental work. It also ensures these theory-performances are not necessarily consistent with one another in the sense of articulating an *original* (macho) philosophical vision or system, attributable solely to me, that is more or less the same in every location and circumstance, and which comes replete with its own philosophical language. Instead, they constitute a multiplicity of forms of intervention that are responding critically and creatively to particular issues, thinkers and problems across a number of different sites and situations.

I would thus agree with Méndez Cota when she writes that, when it comes to translating anti-bourgeois theory into elitist Mexico ‘in ways that are situated, concrete, and alive’, we need to be aware that ‘the specific histories of liberalism in Mexico’ and ‘in the Mexican university today’ (2020: 168) mean that, ‘instead of liberal bourgeois values, the practice of writing in Mexico has embodied *criollo* values – those of the Spanish colonisers’ ‘descendants’ (168, 169). Does it follow that in Mexico – ‘a context that does not usually name liberalism as *the* enemy’ – it may be inappropriate to call, or even recognise, what I’m talking about as ‘anti-bourgeois theory’ (165)? Might anti-bourgeois theory be better translated and reinvented as a form of anti-criollo theory? I will leave this for others to decide.³

What I will say is that this emphasis on situating theory in complex, contingent and unstable contexts has definite implications for my concern with the work of scholars in Hispanic American nations and their interest in the ‘subalternist and decolonial turns’ (Méndez Cota, 2020: 169). As Andrea Francke points out, there’s a danger of simplistically appropriating fashionable concepts such as decolonisation (or intersectionality, or indeed pluriversal politics) that are actually highly ‘experience- or situation-specific’. These concepts are then applied everywhere or anywhere as an unquestioned moral good in a manner that leaves little scope for reflection or complication. For Francke, for example, there is not just one theory or use of decolonisation. She sees Latin American decolonising theory as ‘a situated conversation’ that is ‘trying to understand and act in the world through the embodied experience of living in a world created at the moment of colonization’ (Francke, 2020:

199). But the way the decolonial is situated in Latin American countries, where the Spanish colonial project with regard to indigenous populations was often one of elimination, is very different to the history of struggles for independence and decolonisation of those African states that were colonised by France, Portugal or Belgium (2020: 200). The above are different again from how decolonisation is applied in contemporary England, especially in universities, libraries, archives and museums. Here it frequently takes the form of a strategy Francke sums up as: “How can I keep my whiteness at the centre without having to carry any guilt?” (2020: 201). As far as she is concerned, if people want to decolonise then they need to:

learn to be comfortable *not* being at the centre of every fucking concept.
... I think about people and movements in South America who only do things in Spanish because they don't want to speak to the fucking 'centre' (implied irony). They do their thing. Like Feminismo Comunitario or Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui. They don't translate their work into English. Because time and again people (academics and artists) come and appropriate it. They find it and decide: 'this is about me!', and suddenly they place themselves at the centre and push these voices out (Francke, 2020: 203).

For Francke, decolonisation is a continuous process, one that is very different to thinking all traces of coloniality can be erased from bodies, minds, gender, sexuality, race, education systems, universities, libraries, museums. (Such erasure is especially difficult if we consider coloniality to be constitutive of modernity and modernist forms of politics [Escobar, 2020: xv].) It's a process that might even be applied to the idea of people learning to be comfortable *not* being at the centre of every concept, especially if there's a danger of this lesson slipping into the kind of fundamentalist identity politics some associate with US academic liberalism. For Gareth Williams, for example, the decolonial approach or 'option' in Latin America that is coordinated around the writings of Walter Dignolo and others:

is more a hindrance to decolonisation than a help, for until there is a decolonisation of the law of the Subject (that is, of identity thinking) there can be no decolonisation at all. Until then the entire history of Western phallo-logocentrism (that is, the legacies of identity and difference; of the

paternal, the familial, the fraternal, the Law, the Christian community, the hearth, the nation, the homo-philial, *lo nuestro* etc.) remains firmly in place in, and thanks to, the decolonial option, despite its accusations of Eurocentrism and its claims of a political and cultural alternative to the reigning nomos (Williams, 2016).

As Méndez Cota notes, others such as Moreiras go even further. In *Against Abstraction*, Moreiras insists that:

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 fundamentalist in a world that was and is complacent enough with identitarian fundamentalism’ (Méndez Cota, 2020: 173; Moreiras, 2020: 28)

Suffice it to say that, as far as I am concerned, anti-bourgeois theory is, as Méndez Cota emphasises, ‘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”’ (Méndez Cota, 2020: 174). In fact, I’m not overly focused on devising a new philosophy at all, something to compete with, say, post-Marxism, posthumanism or indeed infrapolitics – although I know this is what theorists are expected to do. There’s something conservative about such apparent creativity for me. When it comes to formulating what might be understood as *my* theory of media, I likewise weave between multiple analytical categories and conceptual tools: new cultural studies, open media, open humanities, liquid theory, disruptive humanities, inhumanities, pirate philosophy, media gifts, anti-bourgeois theory. I also repeat ideas and passages across my written work to promote heterogeneous, nonlinear forms of engaging with it. Sometimes I make such sampling and remixing explicit by means of the conventional system of citations, quotation marks and endnotes. Sometimes I do not. After all, a major focus of my work is appropriation and piracy. I can hardly treat the topic without engaging in it. Any

uncertainty this creates about authorship and originality, and about what I want, what I am *for*, is therefore a feature, not a bug.⁴ Moreover, while nearly all of my projects are available to access, download and distribute for free (*gratis*), with no barriers such as pay walls, many of them are published on a basis that, given the lack of a licence consistent with the anti-bourgeois, inhumanist, piratical approaches I am articulating here, acknowledges yet denies the copyrighting performed by default by a public domain CC-0 licence or when all rights are otherwise waived. (This applies even to texts that go on to appear in some form in books or journal articles.) These texts can be copied, remixed, built upon, translated and reused in any medium, without indication of origin, by an open multiplicity of others. They are consequently that little bit harder (although of course not impossible) to protect, commodify, market and control as *my* unified and self-identical *works*.

What I'm interested in, then, is experimenting with different possibilities for being a theorist – of even producing theory *without a theorist*. Far from striving to develop an original, true or right philosophy or a securely located authorial identity, the role of the theorist or, better, the role of theory for me is more about helping to instigate and conduct dynamic processes and generative relations and intervening to make things happen like that. In this respect, 'Gary Hall' can be thought of as a concept-character: it's an avatar or persona that operates to render less stable the distinctions between the individual, the plural, the communal and the collective. In place of using a mask, a phoney me, to conceal my real name, Gary Hall is a real name that acts as a mask. It refers to a theorist-self that is always in the process of being composed out of a multiplicity of different situations and circumstances.

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Notes

- ¹ Other features of anti-bourgeois theory include its being: performative and prefigurative; postliterary; low key; and concerned with infrastructure (Hall, 2021b).
- ² For an earlier 'posthegemonic' analysis of hegemonic and counterhegemonic politics on my part, see Hall (2008).
- ³ I notice that Moreiras, for example, refers to the Latin America city as 'exclusively and militantly liberal-criollo ... and exclusionary of essentially nonwhite populations and also women' (2020: 15).
- ⁴ Even this comment about plagiarism is plagiarised – from the appendix to David Shields' *Reality Hunger* (2011: 209).

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