

# The Inhumanist Manifesto

Hall G.

Published PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

**Original citation:**

Hall, G 2017, 'The Inhumanist Manifesto' *Media Theory*.

ISSN 2557-826X

Publisher: Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ)

**Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.**



## The Inhumanist

### Manifesto

GARY HALL

Coventry University, UK

Media Theory  
Vol. 1 | No. 1 | 168-178  
© The Author(s) 2017  
CC-BY-NC-ND  
<http://mediatheoryjournal.org/>

The manifesto mode of political writing is associated with some of the themes and topics I've engaged with the most – posthumanism, piracy, Marxism, open access, the commons. Nevertheless, I'm hesitant to respond to your invitation to help launch *Media Theory* by producing a manifesto as to why an open access journal on media theory is necessary, and what I would like to see it do. I'm not interested in setting *agendas* or laying out *policies* with my work. Nor do I wish to get involved in *debates*.

Yet the reason I hesitate to write a manifesto for you is not just because I'm reluctant to promote new ideas with prescriptive notions about how to carry out those changes I believe need to be made. Nor is my wavering due to a concern that the power of this particular textual form of communication may have waned as a result of too much unthinking repetition, and an associated preference on my part for less obvious ways of acting. Having launched an open access theory journal myself a number of years ago – *Culture Machine* – I'm also aware there's a danger of coming across as if I'm telling you what you should do with *Media Theory*.

Sometimes the most responsible decision anyone who has attained even a modest position of authority can make is to step aside after a while. Of course, it can be difficult to relinquish what are often hard-won roles. Nevertheless it's important to do so, *regardless of any success*, in order to create openings and opportunities for others. Which is why my colleagues and I decided to celebrate *Culture Machine's* 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary by passing editorial control over the journal's future direction on to Gabriela Méndez Cota and Rafico Ruiz, two early career theorists who are located in

Mexico and Canada, respectively. And I would no more consider telling you what to do with your open access theory journal than I would Gabriela and Rafico with what is now theirs.

Still, I would like to take this opportunity to offer you my continuing support. So if a manifesto can be understood as a public declaration of the views, motives or intentions of the issuer, perhaps I can reply to your invitation by briefly making obvious the theory that lies behind the development of *Culture Machine* and some of the other projects with which I'm involved. I will then leave it to you to decide how much, if anything, of this is relevant as far as your intentions for *Media Theory* are concerned.

\*\*\*

To put my theory of media in the language of a manifesto, I believe in:

**Working collaboratively and collectively** – as I do with a number of different actors, groups and organisations, some of which go under the names of [Culture Machine](#), [Open Humanities Press](#), and the [Radical Open Access Collective](#).<sup>1</sup>

**Operating according to a non-profit philosophy** – for example, [Open Humanities Press](#) is a Community Interest Company whose open access books and journals are available for free (*gratis*), and many of them on a reuse (*libre*) basis too.

**Acting in a non-rivalrous, non-competitive fashion** to explore new models for the economy, for property and for ownership. Witness Open Humanities Press's sharing of its expertise and [publications](#) with other open access publishers and journals (such as *Media Theory*). But these new models also include the unlimited collective use of knowledge and materials associated with online file sharing networks, [shadow libraries](#) and so-called [Internet piracy](#).

**Taking a hyper-political approach** – not least to [open access](#), [free and open source software](#), [open data](#), [open science](#) and [open education](#).

**Gifting labour** as a means of developing notions of the community, the common and of commoning that [break with the conditions supporting the unified, sovereign, proprietorial humanist subject](#).

**Generating projects** that are concerned not only with representing or critiquing the world, but also with intra-acting with the world in order to make things happen. One of terms I've used to characterize these performative projects is '[media gifts](#)'. Along with the already-mentioned *Culture Machine*, Open Humanities Press and Radical Open Access Collective, they include [Liquid Books](#), [Living Books About Life](#), [Liquid Theory TV](#), [Photomediations: An Open Book](#), and [after.video](#).<sup>2</sup> Together, these *media gifts* form a network of books, journals, videos, presses, websites, collectives and communities that are engaged in organising and shaping theory and criticism.

That said, the projects with which I'm involved are not confined to the world of media theory. One way of thinking about them is as a plurality of forms of intervention that respond to specific issues across a number of different sites: art, activism, education, business, culture, politics, technology and the media. Their shared aim is to disarticulate the existing playing field and foster instead a variety of antagonistic spaces that contribute to the development of counter-institutions and counter-environments. This is why it's important to produce a range of different interventions: because the 'counter-hegemonic struggle is a process involving a multiplicity of ruptures', as Chantal Mouffe puts it.<sup>3</sup> What these different performative media projects have in common is that they are characterised by a willingness to open up an unconditional space for thinking about politics and the political beyond the ways in which they have conventionally been conceived. This is what I mean by the '[hyper-political](#)'.

The political here is not merely about the kind of intended consequences and effects that can be articulated in advance. The political is also something that has to be invented and created in relation to specific practices, in particular contingent situations and contexts, by performing the associated decisions, and otherwise doing things that may be unanticipated and unpredictable – and that are thus *beyond* analysis.

There is something artistic and [poetic](#) about this invention: it is not just theoretical or philosophical. Hence my interest in poeticity and [singularity](#), and why I often describe these [media gifts](#) as operating at the intersections of art, theory, politics and media.

My current work-in-progress, provisionally titled *Data Commonism vs ÜberCapitalism*, is to be understood in these terms. It's designed not merely to offer a critique of the for-profit sharing and gig economy businesses of digital capitalism. *Data Commonism vs ÜberCapitalism* is also intended to form part of an expanded, interrupted, iterative text involved in generating a performative media project that intra-acts with the world in order to invent a different, more caring future: for the sharing and gig economies; for our towns and cities; but also for post-industrial, [post-capitalist society](#). The aim of this project is to make a counter-hegemonic intervention by re-articulating the situation in a new configuration, thus affirmatively disrupting digital capitalism so we might begin to replace Uber, Airbnb, Deliveroo et al. with a multi-polar consortium of counter-information and data platforms. Among other things, *Data Commonism vs ÜberCapitalism* asks: how can we as theorists work collaboratively to invent new ways of organising platforms, institutions and communities that don't just repeat the anti-political reductionism, lack of criticality and individualistic, liberal democratic humanism that is a feature of other accounts of community and the commons? (And I include in this those associated with platform cooperativism.) What if we were to devise our own collaborative community or information and data commons as a way of creating an actual, affective point of potentiality and transformation with a view to countering übercapitalism and its for-profit sharing and gig economies?

To this list of public declarations of what I believe, can be added a commitment to:

**Interrogating those fundamental propositions that are taken for granted by theories of data, the digital and the commons.** The word 'data' has its English origins in the mid-17th century as the plural of the Latin word 'datum'. The latter means a proposition that is assumed, given or taken for granted, upon which a theoretical framework can be constructed or a conclusion drawn as a result of

reasoning or calculation. It's those propositions that our culture assumes as a given in order to construct theories and draw conclusions about data that I'm committed to investigating. They include the '[digital](#)' itself, in many ways now an irrelevant attribute given nearly all media involve *becoming with* digital information processing.<sup>4</sup> Other datum points are the human, technology, the printed text, the network, copyright and IP. For example, who does the measuring when it comes to data and who is this measuring for? Conventionally, it is the human subject. (It is *people* who are the presumed viewers of data visualizations, for instance. So these visualizations contain an implicit humanism.) With what? With technology and tools seen as separate from the human (which is the case even if the data is machine read). How are the measurements – the data – recorded, published and disseminated? Print texts and computerized information networks. How is this circulation controlled? It is controlled through copyright.

The etymology of the word data thus raises an important issue for ideas of an information and data commons. The datum points that are at risk of being taken for granted in the construction of such a theoretical framework – and that I interrogate in *Data Commonism vs ÜberCapitalism* – include capitalism, liberalism, humanism, freedom, democracy, community, communism, and even the commons itself.

**Engaging with the existing institutions (e.g. the law, politics, the press) so as to transform them.** Since they are the institutions to which theorists are most closely tied, I focus in particular on the university, the library and the scholarly publishing industry, together with their associated liberal humanist values and practices, based as they are on ideas of the individual proprietorial author, authenticity, the codex print text and the finished (and finishable) static object. The idea is to interrogate and transform what it means to create, publish and disseminate knowledge and research. Some of the projects with which I'm engaged thus concentrate on the [book](#), [fixity](#), and [copyright](#); others focus on [education](#), [teaching](#), the [archive](#) and [academic social networks](#).

[Pirate Philosophy](#), for example, draws attention to the material factors of intellectual labour. In marked contrast to much 'new materialism', the latter includes, for me, the

work of 'publishers, editors, peer-reviewers, designers, copy-editors, proof readers, printers, publicists, marketers, distributors, retailers' (as well as that of the 'agency workers, packers, and so-called "ambassadors" in Amazon's "fulfillment centers"). It also takes in 'the financial investments made' when producing, publishing and distributing knowledge and research, 'the energy and resources used, the plants, minerals, dyes, oils, petroleum distillates, salts, compounds and pigments, the transport, shipping and container costs, the environmental impact, and so forth'.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, '[Disrupting the Humanities: Towards Posthumanities](#)', a special video issue of the [Journal of Electronic Publishing](#) I produced with Janneke Adema, addresses the seminar and seminar series, the talk, paper, or presentation, and the journal issue, as well as the individualistic nature of most humanities (and posthumanities) research.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to actively engage with institutions. Simply abandoning or rejecting them in favour of establishing places outside where 'the common' can be achieved risks our work as theorists being co-opted by these institutions all the more. Consider the way the Autonomist Marxist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri support the aggressive, profit-maximizing capitalist publishing companies [Amazon](#) and [Penguin Random House](#).<sup>7</sup> There is little sense of these post-operaist thinkers transforming the accepted common sense rules of the game regarding how theory is produced, published, and circulated (i.e., as original, rational, linearly written and organised, copyrighted books), so that a new politics of publishing can be articulated based on communism or the commons.

From this point of view, as Pauline van Mourik Broekman, Ted Byfield, Shaun Hides, Simon Worthington and myself show in [Open Education](#):

- There is no outside to the university in any simple sense, this idea of an outside being itself a university (that is, a philosophical) idea, even if it is one that has not always been theorized rigorously.
- Efforts to occupy a place or space that is autonomous from the traditional university (whether they are physically located outside the institution or not) too often end up unwittingly trapped inside it, in the sense of unconsciously

repeating many of its structures and problems. In particular, such efforts tend to take insufficient account of the way many of those involved in establishing such supposedly *autonomous* institutions are themselves the products of, and maintain a relationship with, the traditional university.

- Attacking the ‘public’ university poses a danger of lending force to neoliberalism’s practice of bolstering global corporate institutions while simultaneously undermining nearly all others.
- There is a case to be made for supporting and defending the university as one of the few remaining public spaces where difficult, challenging and avowedly non-commercial ideas can still be developed, explored and disseminated. As recent protests by university students and cleaners attest, it is one of the few places where the imposition of neoliberalism and its emphasis on production, privatisation and the interests of the market is still being struggled over or even actively resisted.
- Creating autonomous spaces *outside* of the established institutions risks leaving the traditional university—along with the scholarly publishing industry and library – in place and unquestioned.<sup>8</sup>

**Using numerous and at times conflicting figures, voices, registers, and semiotic functions** – multiple differential authorial ‘I’s, as it were – in order to transform my own work processes and produce something different: not only from the [microentrepreneur of the self](#) that übercapitalism is making us become; but also from the liberal humanist subjectivity that is the default alternative adopted by even the most radical of theorists.

In [Pirate Philosophy](#) I adopt the persona or mask of the pirate, someone who for the ancient Greeks and Romans does not belong to a ‘community tied... to a clearly delimited territory’, but rather lives a more fluid life, and who tries, tests, teases and troubles as well as attacks.<sup>9</sup> In [The Uberfication of the University](#) – which is where I develop the concept of the microentrepreneur of the self – I articulate my subjectivity more in terms of the experimenter.<sup>10</sup> As Jean-François Lyotard makes clear, the latter differs from the intellectual in that they are not endeavoring to speak for a universal subject, be it ‘man, humanity, the nation, the people, the



proletariat'.<sup>11</sup> In fact, an experimenter does not have a pre-given addressee, whether this be an individual, group, or political party that they are trying to communicate with, win over, and seduce. (In this respect there is no subject or referent for them to address by means of the mode of writing that is the manifesto.) Rather, the experimenter is by definition involved in questioning the limits of pre-constituted fields in order to ask, what is art, or writing, or philosophy – or, in my case, what is theory, and what is it to be a theorist?

So I'm not trying to come up with a big, new, masculine philosophical system or ontology of my own; something to rival those of accelerationism, speculative realism, or media archeology, say – which of course is what theorists and philosophers traditionally do. Instead, I am more interested in exploring multiple different ways of being, different ways of doing things as a theorist, different ways for theorists to organise themselves and their [subjectivities](#). This is why, when it comes to articulating my theory of media, I move between a range of concepts and philosophies: new cultural studies, open media, liquid theory, disruptive humanities, posthumanities, pirate philosophy ...

Rather than simply positioning my theory in opposition to that of competing thinkers, I also frequently enact it by collaborating critically and creatively with the work of other contemporary theorists. They include Rosi Braidotti, Jodi Dean, Stuart Hall, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Richard Hoggart, Lev Manovich, Angela McRobbie, Chantal Mouffe, Bernard Stiegler and Raymond Williams. It is a manner of doing things that ensures my theory is not always the same in every situation and circumstance. Instead it responds in singular ways to specific thinkers and specific issues across a number of different sites. Similarly, when I write 'I' here, I am not referring to myself in a naive sense (as if I am still operating according to a model of the sovereign, unified human author as individual creative genius). The projects I characterise as *media gifts* emerge out of my processual intra-active relations with a multitude of different actors, institutions and communities. To build on the work of Mark Amerika and Alfred North Whitehead, they can best be thought of as stimulating the development of a *novel togetherness* that comprises neither singularities, nor pluralities, nor collectivities.

**Reinventing the humanities and posthumanities.** To decenter the human according to an understanding of subjectivity that perceives the latter as produced by complex meshworks of other humans and nonhumans (be they technologies, animals, insects, plant life, fungi, compost, the environment or the cosmos), [requires us to act differently as theorists](#) from the way in which the majority of those associated with the posthuman, the nonhuman and the crisis of life itself, which are expressed by the concepts of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene, act. We need to displace the humanist concepts that underpin our ideas of the author, the book, and copyright, together with their accompanying practices of reading, writing, analysis and critique. And we need to do so by performing these concepts and practices differently in the ways in which *we* live, work and think as theorists. Otherwise we risk the human subject retaining a privileged place at the very heart of our theory, along with an implicit and unexamined humanism.

For sure, everything I have written here can be gathered under the sign of the ‘posthumanities’. Approaches to the posthumanities, however, have been dominated by the [posthuman humanities of Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe](#). This is why I propose that the above transformative conception of the human and the humanities may be more productively articulated in terms of the inhuman and the inhumanities. My reasoning being that such a rhetorical and conceptual shift might enable us to better challenge the sovereign, unified, liberal humanist subject that serves as a datum point to so many theories, not just of the humanities, but of the posthuman and posthumanities, too. If the inhuman equals the human intertwined with the nonhuman, then the inhumanities *are* the humanities, only with this intra-active figure at their heart. In other words, the inhumanities are a way of acting, thinking, and working that – rather than trying to ignore or otherwise deny it – actually takes *account of* and *assumes* an intra-active relation *with* the nonhuman.

\*\*\*

Proceeding on the basis that a manifesto works by performatively creating the very subject it purports to address, let me put all this in the form of a ten-point written statement. Consider it a gift.

## The Inhumanist Manifesto

1. Work collaboratively and collectively.
2. Operate according to a non-profit philosophy.
3. Act in a non-rivalrous, non-competitive fashion to explore new models for property, ownership and the economy.
4. Take a hyper-political approach.
5. Gift labour as a means of developing notions of the community, the common and of commoning that break with the conditions supporting the unified, sovereign, proprietorial subject.
6. Generate projects that are concerned, not only with representing or critiquing the world, but also with intra-acting with the world.
7. Interrogate those propositions that are often taken for granted by theory. The list is a long one. It includes data, the digital, the human, technology, the printed text, the network and copyright. Other propositions that are assumed by theorists when drawing conclusions about the media are capitalism, liberalism, humanism, freedom, democracy, community, communism, and the commons.
8. Engage with the existing institutions – especially those to which theorists are most closely tied such as the university, the library, and the scholarly publishing industry – so as to transform them.
9. Use different personas or masks to experiment with producing multiple authorial 'I's, different to the liberal humanist subjectivity that is the default adopted by even the most supposedly radical of theorists.
10. Reinvent both the humanities and the posthumanities as the inhumanities by adopting ways of being and doing as theorists that actually take *account of* and *assume* an intra-active relation *with* the nonhuman.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Culture Machine* (<http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm>); Open Humanities Press (<http://openhumanitiespress.org>); and the Radical Open Access Collective (<http://radicaloa.disruptivemedia.org.uk>).
- <sup>2</sup> Liquid Books (<http://liquidbooks.pbwiki.com/>); Living Books About Life (<http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org>); Liquid Theory TV (<http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/354/358>); *Photomediations: An Open Book* (<http://www.photomediationsopenbook.net/>); and *after/video* (<http://www.metamute.org/shop/openmute-press/after.video>).
- <sup>3</sup> Chantal Mouffe, in Íñigo Errejón and Chantal Mouffe, *Podemos: In The Name Of The People* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016), 40.
- <sup>4</sup> For more, see Janneke Adema and Gary Hall, 'Posthumanities: The Dark Side of "The Dark Side of the Digital"', in Janneke Adema and Gary Hall, eds, *Disrupting the Humanities: Towards Posthumanities*, *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, Vol. 9, No.2, Winter, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0019.201>.
- <sup>5</sup> Gary Hall, *Pirate Philosophy: For a Digital Posthumanities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016), 115.
- <sup>6</sup> Janneke Adema and Gary Hall, eds, *Disrupting the Humanities: Towards Posthumanities*, *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, Vol. 9, No.2, Winter, 2016, <http://www.journalofelectronicpublishing.org/disrupting-humanities.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Declaration* (self-published and originally released as an Amazon 'Kindle single' in May 2012), <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Declaration-Michael-Hardt-x/dp/0786752904>; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War And Democracy In The Age Of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2005).
- <sup>8</sup> Pauline van Mourik Broekman, Gary Hall, Ted Byfield, Shaun Hides, Simon Worthington *Open Education: A Study In Disruption* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2014), 7-8, <https://curve.coventry.ac.uk/open/file/c04530ce-d16a-46ca-b359-a905195a76cb/1/Open%20education.pdf>.
- <sup>9</sup> Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Pirates And The Law Of Nations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), 17; quoted in Gary Hall, *Pirate Philosophy*, n.106, 219-220.
- <sup>10</sup> Gary Hall, *The Uberfication Of The University* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), <https://curve.coventry.ac.uk/open/items/4b7671d5-371f-438b-83c7-9275935550f8/1/>.
- <sup>11</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Tomb Of The Intellectual', in *Jean-François Lyotard: Political Writings* (London: UCL Press, 2003), 3.

**Gary Hall** is a media theorist working in the areas of philosophy, art and politics. He is Professor of Media and Performing Arts in the Faculty of Arts & Humanities at Coventry University, UK. He is author/co-author of six books, including most recently *Pirate Philosophy* (MIT Press, 2016) and *The Uberfication of the University* (Minnesota UP, 2016). In 1999 he co-founded the critical theory journal *Culture Machine*, while in 2006 he co-founded Open Humanities Press (OHP).

**Email:** [gary@garyhall.info](mailto:gary@garyhall.info)