

Gary Hall, **Pirate Philosophy: For a Digital Posthumanities**, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016, 248 pp., \$42.00 (hardcover).

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Gary Hall's ***Pirate Philosophy: For a Digital Posthumanities*** is a series of theoretical essays appealing to scholars and graduate students in a wide variety of fields, including the digital humanities, computer science, and library studies. The main objective of the work is to challenge the reader to think radically regarding the future of publishing in as much as our present choices impact that future. Hall explores not only new ways of thinking but also new ways of being "pirate" theorists and philosophers, questioning definitions of "the human, the subject, the author, copyright" (p. xiv). He puns the term *pirate*, evoking both pop-culture usage and historic definitions of attacking explorers.

One of the many strengths of Hall's argument is to suggest that we scrutinize even those nonprofits striving to do good, if indeed they are working within assumptions predicated on a profit-driven, law-based publishing model. Creative Commons, for example, falls within such passive structures that essentially start from a position of wrong thinking within a capitalistic model. Hall suggests that even more radical departures such as copyleft should strive further in being copyfarleft or copygift. Chapter 1, "The Commons and Community: How We Remain Modern," engages our definition of shared intellectual community, seeking to abandon the "I" as well as leader dependencies. Chapter 2, "The Humanities: There Are No Digital Humanities," by its very title, upturns frequent, trendy assumptions regarding understanding of the digital humanities by considering what the humanities might become without relying on computer science apart from critical thought—in short, that all humanities require a human to interpret patterns aggregated by big data.

In a summoning charge to all academics, Hall highlights the nexus of peer-reviewed journals as revolving centrally around the vetting of persons for promotion, funding, and, ultimately, continued employability. Like Lori Emerson's *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound* (2014), Hall attacks the monetization of personal data—an annual billion-dollar industry within the U.S.—entangled with data analytics being used both for profit and within the academy. We are so entrenched and dependent on these systems that for those in support of open access, many are still confined by the limitations imposed by a profit-driven, legally minded publishing industry. Echoing posttheoretical scholar Tom Scheinfeldt, Hall emphasizes the question of whether the ideal of the scholar working, thinking, and writing alone will—in this age and the future—put forth advancements within the field of humanities, bringing the reader back to the question and importance of community in the future of scholarship.

Chapter 2 dilates particularly on the cultural analytics of Lev Manovich and the critique that much “data-driven cultural research functions as an alibi for an unthought-out and rather shallow form of humanities scholarship” (p. 51). Themes of self-reflexivity as promoted by Adorno are considered in how they have been imagined, but not yet actualized. Hall concludes the chapter with the introspective note that we may be past not only postdigital and posthuman, but posthumanities as well.

Chapter 3, “The Human: #MySubjectivation,” tackles current states of human subjectivity, overstimulated and overconnected, and asks what new forms of radicalism might look like. In discussing Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, the reader may be reminded of Marshall McLuhan’s stance that we not only make media, but that media—and technology—in turn shape us. While individualism erodes, being human is increasingly intertwined with technology. Here, too, Hall critiques the academic promotion of single-author dissertations and the continuing propagation of the possibly untenable goal of sole creative authorship. Conjuring Foucault and Deleuze, the scholar of the digital humanities must question how automation is functioning as a new mode of control; credit card analytics predict human behaviors while Deleuze’s control society consists of “dividuals” who have seemingly been conditioned for response. As Hall states:

We need to consider seriously how the economy of control invents us and our own knowledge work, philosophy, and minds, as much as we invent it, by virtue of the way it modifies and homogenizes our thought and behavior through its media technologies. (p. 69)

Chapter 3, in particular, interrogates our current system of higher education—an expanding “labor regime”—that would be of particular interest to that readership. Human capital, it would seem, is progressively less about individual, unique advances than it is consumer behaviors controlled by the very technologies that were human-created. As we self-curate within this new social norm, many academics find the distinction between work and nonwork increasingly vague. Hall scrutinizes the large publishing conglomerates that take advantage of the new control system in the academy by exploiting those publishing academics. Academic libraries respond to the rapidly rising costs of journals by scaling back book-purchasing power, thus further exacerbating the “monograph crisis” (p. 78). Hall’s assessment is that even the most forward of thinkers is prey to this system of exploitation—the answer may be to disengage from the system itself.

The author seeks to fill the gaps left by Stiegler while advancing his theories. The direction that Hall moves is toward the OHP, or Open Humanities Press. In this way, chapter 4, “The Posthuman: What Are the Digital Posthumanities?” might be viewed as a soft advertisement. Hall focuses particularly on the publication experiment dubbed, “Living Books About Life,” a series that is both open source and open-minded regarding how a book is conceived, for example, vis-à-vis ongoing editing and improvement.

Hall defines *posthuman* as “concerned with the displacement of the unified, self-reflexive, and rational humanist subject from its central place in the world” (p. 93). This definition of posthumanism is important to understanding Hall’s discussion of the digital posthumanities as a field. Whereas even 10 years ago discussion of posthumanism was saturated with science fiction overtones, it has become mainstream within the academy, recognizing that our posthumanity evolves almost undetected with each

operating system upgrade that we authorize. Hall's challenge to his readers is to remind us that we are enchanteled by the gravitational pull of a rights-holding, Enlightenment ideal for the individual. It is this slavish mentality that binds us to the exploitive behaviors found within academic publishing today. He advocates pushing past these boundaries toward a new form of publishing (digital) and a new form of humanities scholarship (post).

Hall discusses *The Posthuman* (2013) author Rosi Braidotti's lament of the current "zombified landscape of theory" (p. 102), like a grainy midcentury film with theorists lurching forward, arms outstretched ungraspingly, eyes glazed over in a mindless haze. Theory that once excited has turned and re-turned, a sad, faded version of something once radical, now pabulum. The question remains, if we are to be unbound by the ideals of humanism, how are we to forge ahead in the humanities? Regarding Braidotti, how might one reconcile the contradiction of posthuman critical theory being antihumanism—what new avenues remain? The answer, Hall posits, in conjunction with Derrida's theoretical trajectory, is in assisting "those of us who are not resistant to thinking through the conditions and assumptions of our own disciplines" (p. 107)—in short, in being self-reflexive. For this chapter, I would recommend that the reader add to the discussion with some reading of and reference to the writings of Jean Baudrillard.

Chapter 5, "Copyright and Piracy: Pirate Radical Philosophy," encourages the reader to struggle against a system of copyright that does little to truly empower the author. Hall states, "This is why I am suggesting perhaps acting something like pirate philosophers: because a responsible ethical, as opposed to moralistic, approach to piracy would not presume to know what it is in advance" (p. 141). In other words, we can no longer trust the system, but must be boldly rogue for a greater good, a humanitarian good. Chapter 6, "The Future of the Book: The Unbound Book," follows closely on the heels of the previous chapter, probing the norms of books, their binding, their fixity in our minds. Thinking in terms of copyright and then copyleft, why does an author not anticipate potential piracy and offer her or his manuscript to open networks such as Aaaaarg or LibGen and thereby take control of an inevitable destiny? Rather than surrender to a pre- and postpublication trap, Hall asks, why not further exploit the liquid potential of the book?

Hall's advice is sensible: that, when confronting impossible decisions, we meet them "as responsibly, and with as much care and thought, as possible" (p. 117) and do so with open minds, not with outright rejection of pirate activism. The crux of this book is not a narrative of illegal versus legal, but one that strikes directly at ethical behaviors and our apprehensions of those within a context where individuals are increasingly lost to themselves, guided by profit-driven controlled behaviors, slavishly following systems increasingly informed by analytics.

References

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.

Emerson, L. (2014). *Reading writing interfaces: From the digital to the bookbound*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.