

## **Towards a Literary Public Sphere: the *Mercurio Peruano*, Lima, 1791**

Adam Sharman

*Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire*

Dr A Sharman, Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, NG7 2RD; [adam.sharman@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:adam.sharman@nottingham.ac.uk)

Adam Sharman is Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of *Tradition and Modernity in Spanish American Literature: From Darío to Carpentier* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and *Otherwise Engaged: Hegel, Latin America, and the Philosophy of History* (CCCP, 2013), and the co-editor of *1812 Echoes: The Cadiz Constitution in Hispanic History, Culture and Politics* (Cambridge Scholars, 2013). He is currently working on a project called *Moments of Modernity: In Latin America*.

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## Towards a Literary Public Sphere: the *Mercurio Peruano*, Lima, 1791

This article examines the applicability of Habermas' concept of the public sphere to the periodical paper the *Mercurio Peruano* in 1791. It compares the conditions of production of Habermas' 'model' eighteenth-century European bourgeois public sphere to those of a colonial, *ancien régime* Lima complete with Inquisition censorship. It suggests that Habermas' literary—rather than political—public sphere, training ground for a critical civic public reflection, is the more fruitful concept. Moving beyond contextualist explanations, it argues that the *Mercurio*'s Enlightenment meditations on the capital's 'civil system'—on its commerce and its cafés—construct the public sphere through and in the productive force of critical reason itself. In its patriotic pages we glimpse both the signs of a 'modern' public sphere of civil society in the interstices of formal politics before independence and a reminder that the public sphere, based on a reason that exceeds any determinate historical structure, is never exclusively modern.

Keywords: public sphere; *Mercurio Peruano*; Enlightenment.

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Does the publication of the *Mercurio Peruano* help 'configure' something like a 'public sphere' in Lima, 1791?<sup>1</sup> Given the persistence of the old hierarchies of the Catholic monarchy and the heightened ethnic divisions following the Tupac Amaru rebellion of the early 1780s, it would appear unlikely that a largely elite-creole periodical paper had 'consolidated' a public sphere, where the latter is taken to be synonymous with an egalitarian associationism.<sup>2</sup> Hierarchy and social exclusion pervade the Viceroyalty of La Plata at the end of the eighteenth century.

The category of the public sphere does not, of course, come from Lima, 1791. Even if it is not absolutely Habermasian, the category of the public sphere is unavoidably Habermasian, since it was Jürgen Habermas who, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, bequeathed the most decisive historico-theoretical account of what he called *Öffentlichkeit* (public, state of being public, publicness, public life, public sphere). Receiving this Habermasian legacy (a legacy is always a complex inheritance that remains to be deciphered and sifted) entails, at the very least, a double risk. First, the risk of imagining that there was only ever one species of public sphere and that that species was, in its essence, bourgeois, European, emancipatory and rationalist. Taken thus, the idea of the public sphere would be one more negative verdict on a Latin America always judged to be lacking someone else's history (your public sphere wasn't very well developed, was it?). In fact, the public sphere 'blueprint', to use a word from the translation of Habermas' book, is itself not so certain. Habermas conceded that the 'bourgeois' public sphere was permeated by demands from below, outlined three different variants of the European public sphere, and has been criticised for exaggerating its emancipatory potential and failing to address the question of religion—this last, vital for any consideration of colonial Spanish America.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is worth remembering that *The Structural Transformation* is a lament for a *European* lack. The whole of the second half of the book is a lament for a properly critical public sphere which, he believes (in 1961), Europe no longer has (Europe's public sphere has been taken over by the mass media and is thus no public sphere to speak of). Alongside any question of the adequacy of the Habermasian category of the public sphere to late colonial Lima, therefore, is the question of its adequacy to Europe. Europe, Habermas intimates, lacks its own history.

The second risk is that of imagining that there could be an alternative configuration of something approaching a public sphere which shared none of the material or symbolic DNA of the Habermasian species. Let us emancipate ourselves from other (categories of) public spheres, identify our own public sphere—Catholic, Hispanic, colonial, non-bourgeois, autochthonous even... It is as if Latin America did not have irreducible political, economic, conceptual and ethical complicities with the categories of the European tradition and the social configuration that inspired those categories (see Habermas 1999, xvii).

Without reducing either risk, I shall suggest in what follows that a deal between the two can be brokered by foregrounding, not Habermas' *political* public sphere (which, by 1791, almost no country in the world had), but his more properly eighteenth-century *literary* public sphere. This category is tied to a certain European social and intellectual configuration. But the category exceeds Europe, much as the phenomena it names (commercial networks, the nation-state, thinking) are not exclusive to Europe but rather are shared, with important colonial differences, by the Indies. In Habermas' Marxist view, these phenomena amount to the political, economic, social and cultural conditions of production which determine the cultural product. His public sphere is one such generative matrix, producing Enlightenment. Habermas' key point is that this generative matrix is itself produced. Over many centuries the public sphere is produced by political, economic, social and cultural mutations. However, it will not be enough to explore the possible configuration of a colonial public sphere by turning to so-called material conditions of production without stopping to think that the cultural product itself helps produce the conditions of production. As though thinking were no kind of productive material. Habermas' 'sociology' of the public sphere itself risks downplaying one of his central claims, namely, that the public sphere consists in the

public use of critical reason by private individuals. What if, then, the *Mercurio Peruano* were an instance, not of the consolidation of a public sphere, but of the power of (divided) critical reason to produce the conditions of and for an uncertain colonial public sphere?

### **Habermas' legacy**

Bearing in mind what has been said above about the precariousness of the public sphere even in its heartlands, let us track Habermas (1999) in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* on the political, economic, social and cultural conditions of production of his public sphere. This sifting will suggest that it is not Habermas' political public sphere but rather his literary public sphere that is of interest for Lima and the *Mercurio Peruano*.

Habermas' account of the European bourgeois political public sphere of the eighteenth century binds its emergence to the shift from the rule of feudal lords to the dominance of the nation-state. Politically speaking, the separation of the private and the public spheres which defines Habermas' public sphere in the modern sense occurs with the nation-state. If the notion of 'private' came to signal that which was excluded from the state sphere, the term 'public' mutated to designate all things associated with the state. This public sphere of the nation-state was different from the sphere of the sovereign. It develops, under absolutism, 'into an entity having an objective existence over against the person of the ruler' (Habermas 1999, 11), the clearest indication of the difference being the separation of the public budget from the sovereign's private holdings. The public purse funds a permanent administration and standing army, which become public institutions separate from the private sphere of the court. In short, Habermas' modern European public sphere belongs to the world of the modern nation-state.

Political change does not occur in isolation, however, and may not even be the principal force behind the public sphere, as Habermas conceives it. That role arguably goes to the economic conditions of production. From the thirteenth century onwards, ‘a far-reaching network of horizontal economic dependencies’ (15) is built up in Europe through early finance and capitalist long-distance trade. Activities and dependencies once confined to the household are now oriented towards an expanded commodity market and coalesce to form *the public sphere of civil society*. For Habermas, a decisive factor in the birth of the European public sphere of civil society is the advent of a commodity exchange economy largely emancipated from government control.

This new economic order entails social change. The liberalised market ‘made affairs in the sphere of social reproduction as much as possible a matter of private people left to themselves and so finally completed the privatization of civil society’ (74). In other words, the new order involves new social actors relatively emancipated in their work from government control. A new stratum of ‘bourgeois’ people, comprising jurists, doctors, pastors, scholars, schoolteachers and scribes, arises alongside the apparatus of the modern state.<sup>4</sup> This bourgeois sphere of civil society adopts a particular attitude towards the public political authorities mentioned above. The existence of state authorities standing over this new, bourgeois group evokes awareness among its members of their status as opponents of the state who yet should have a say in its running. The new public civil society thus develops as this group comes to believe that concern for civil society is no longer confined to the authorities but is rightfully theirs too (23). The public sphere results from, and produces, an altered social order and a new social actor.

Here, in sum, is the canonical Habermasian theme of people’s public use of their reason:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (*öffentliches Rasonnement*). (27)

As Calhoun (1992, 4) observes, Habermas' two-sided category of the public sphere has to do with the quantity as much as the quality of rational-critical debate, by which is meant its availability to as many people as possible.

Finally, Habermas singles out Great Britain as the first and perhaps best example of the public sphere of civil society. Three events in 1694 and 1695 mark its birth. Firstly, the establishment of parliamentary government. Secondly, the founding of the Bank of England to provide fiscal consolidation to a system up to that point held together by commerce. Finally, the elimination of censorship, which allowed for an 'influx' of rational-critical arguments into the press (perhaps it would be better to say: allowed for an influx of more challenging rational-critical arguments, since rational-critical arguments are as old as language). This influx, Habermas says, allowed the press to evolve into an instrument capable of bringing political decisions 'before the new forum of the public' (58).

Herein Habermas' legacy, sifted. The second half of the book, we repeat, will argue that the European public sphere is not a legacy fully accepted in the present and jealously guarded by the continent, but remains instead a legacy to come. One day Europe, too, might receive its own legacy.

### **Lima and a literary public sphere**

The differences between Habermas' eighteenth-century blueprint of the European

political public sphere and the situation of late colonial Peru are predictably stark. A colony, rather than a nation-state, with no parliamentary government. No fiscal autonomy from Spain. No independent network of commercial dependencies (only a trade monopoly by Spain). A social order structured according to *ancien régime* estates, with sharp ethnic divisions between indians, mestizos and those of European descent, and pronounced social divisions, worsened under Bourbon rule, between creoles and European Spaniards. Censorship in cultural matters. In short, the Habermasian ingredients of an independent political public sphere of civil society were absent from Lima in 1791.

And yet such a conclusion risks missing the point. By Habermas' own reckoning, almost no country, with the exception of Great Britain and perhaps France, had a political public sphere by 1791. What many did have is what Habermas calls the precursor to the political public sphere, namely, the literary public sphere. The literary public sphere 'provided the training ground for a critical public reflection [...] of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness' (29). In the reading room and theatre, in museums and concert halls, individuals laid claim to culture 'as the ready topic of a discussion through which an audience-oriented (*publikumsbezogen*) subjectivity communicated with itself' (29). Not, according to Habermas, 'autochthonously bourgeois', this public sphere in the world of letters was born when a group comprising largely the educated middle class (including women) but also servants and apprentices learned the art of critical-rational public debate through its contact with court society and displayed it in the coffee houses, salons and *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies) of the town.

The hybrid character of this literary public sphere resonates with the case of Lima and the *Mercurio Peruano*. Archival work done by Jean-Pierre Clément (1997, 34)



categorises the anonymous contributors to the periodical as follows: ‘intellectuals’ (24%), public administrators (18%), professionals ‘con actividades económicas’ (15%), clergy (14%), military (4%), unknown (25%). These individuals form part of a colonial middle class marked by absolutism and court society:

Lo más importante [...] es la naturaleza económico-social del grupo dominante en la colonia... y en el *Mercurio Peruano*, grupo al que se puede aplicar, pensamos, el calificativo de *burgués*. Es cierto que esta población, a pesar de tener actividades ‘burguesas’ (el comercio, por ejemplo), manifiesta con gran frecuencia tendencias aristocráticas como la compra de títulos nobiliarios o una aspiración vehemente a las condecoraciones y a los hábitos de órdenes de caballería. Pero es éste un rasgo que caracteriza a todas las burguesías nacionales de fines del siglo XVIII. (Clément 1997, 87-88)

Inoperable without ‘estrechos vínculos con el poder virreinal’ (Poupeney-Hart 2009, 175), the *Mercurio* is also economically dependent on authority figures. Its subscribers include a Viceroy, a Regent, ten Oidores, four Alcaldes, two Fiscales and one Archbishop. Later on in its first year of publication, the *Mercurio* renews its vote of thanks to such ‘ilustres personajes’ in suitably *ancien régime* style:

La alta proteccion de los Gefes superiores no ha discontinuado en nuestro fomento, el que hemos logrado igualmente de los mas ilustres personajes del Reyno. Con placer nos extenderíamos en descubrir nuestra gratitud á un esclarecido Prelado cuyas sabias producciones han honrado tanto á nuestro Periódico [...].  
(‘Introduccion’, 1 September 1791, III, 321-322)<sup>5</sup>

And yet, the same piece immediately recalls its ‘sacred’ obligation to another master, to a different authority, namely, the public: ‘Obligados á seguirlas con puntualidad, renovamos los sagrados empeños contraídos con el Público, dedicándonos á completar el resto del año con el mismo esmero con que hemos trabajado los anteriores meses.’ Articulated from within an *ancien régime* rhetorical apparatus, these

words nevertheless invoke a different court: the court of public opinion. And for all its dependence on viceregal connections, the *Mercurio* is an example of a private commercial network, based on subscriptions of 14 *reales* a month or on single purchases by private individuals. At its height the periodical had 517 subscribers (that is more than the *Correo de Madrid*), 46% of whom Clément classifies as belonging to the Third Estate.<sup>6</sup> Clément's (64) estimate is that the *Mercurio* may have achieved a readership-cum-'listenership' of between 4,500 and 5,400 people. While Lima, 1791, neither constitutes a democratic milieu nor hosts a fully-fledged network of bourgeois commercial ties, city and periodical are no strangers to either phenomenon. Indeed, it was more common in the colonies than in the metropolis for nobles to be engaged in commerce, such was the need to distinguish themselves from indians (Clément, 75).

The status of the periodical is less clear, ironically, in the sphere of culture. As soon as we turn its pages does it not become glaringly apparent that the *Mercurio* cannot but fail Habermas' censorship test? Do not its contents immediately signal its affiliation to the *ancien régime*, its 'sacred obligations' tie it straight back to a traditional Catholic as much as monarchical order, and its general contours reinforce rather than undermine the conventional idea that the eighteenth-century Hispanic public sphere, such as it is, is the most uncritical, therefore the most unpublic, public sphere imaginable? If, as we suspect, the public sphere is really Habermas' name for the site of Enlightenment, this view of an unpublic Hispanic public sphere amounts to a familiar claim, which is also a Habermasian claim: namely, that since Enlightenment is essentially opposed to religion (*concesso non dato*), then the most religious parts of the world, such as the Hispanic parts of the world which had long been part of a much older, Catholic sphere, the *communitas christiana*, are necessarily the most inimical to Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the *Mercurio Peruano* as the arm of a 'Catholic' Enlightenment will have to

wait for another occasion. For now, let us pursue only the narrower, Habermasian issue of censorship, since the presence of censorship would appear in and of itself to negate the possibility of an eighteenth-century Lima literary public sphere.

### **The *Mercurio Peruano* and the censorship question**

In an article from 3 November 1791, ‘Progresos del Papel Periodico que se publica en Santa-Fe de Bogotá, anunciado en el *Mercurio Peruano*. Tomo 1. pag. 306.’, the *Mercurio* conjures the institution most synonymous with the image of a benighted Hispanic Catholic world: the Inquisition. The subtext of the piece is censorship. Commenting on a new periodical paper in Santa Fe de Bogotá, the *Mercurio*’s reference to the Inquisition comes in a meditation on the need to distance oneself from public opinion. This is a common and entirely logical theme in the *Mercurio*: it is the task of the Enlightened not always to represent public opinion, but rather to diverge from it and in the process forge a more informed one. The periodical then introduces the related point of censorship. Philosophy, it says, should not be separated from the ‘sagradas máximas de la Religion’.<sup>8</sup> A true ‘Filósofo’ is no libertine or fanatic, enemy of truth and reason, as many mistakenly believe (the piece is written barely two years after the French Revolution), but one who uses philosophy in the service of collective happiness (*la felicidad comun*). But what happens, it asks, when the true philosopher’s efforts are discredited by the very society he strives to help? Surrounded by such misunderstanding, it is all the more necessary to celebrate the arrival of another instrument of enlightenment. The *Mercurio* then details some of the new periodical’s criticisms of New Granada. It should not surprise us, the *Mercurio* says, that some self-interested souls uncomfortable with truth should object to such criticisms. Nor that the prejudiced, ignorant *vulgo*—a term that elsewhere does not just designate the low-born—should resist the truth.<sup>9</sup> In truth, it continues, if one wanted to please the

multitude it would frequently be necessary to adopt ideas that go against true reason (*la recta razon*). The implication here is that one should be careful about public opinion. A critical opinion, the *Mercurio* insinuates, must in certain respects be resolutely unpublic, that is, not conform to public opinion, and certainly not always please the *vulgo* (which, we repeat, does not just mean the low-born).

But the real import of this meditation is revealed in a footnote on the recent censorship by the Inquisition of five European periodical papers. The *Mercurio* wants to make its own position plain (in truth, it never has just one position):

El Gobierno, y el Tribunal de la fe jamas olvidan la solicitud de reprimir las producciones relativamente nocivas á la Religion, y al Estado. Baxo de la proteccion del primero, y en la esperanza de no merecer la censura del segundo, se han dado á luz, corren, y correrán nuestros Periodicos sin desviarse del principal objeto para que fueron establecidos. (II, 169)

The *Mercurio* respects government and the Inquisition, will seek protection from the former and try not to be censored by the latter, but will do all this *without deviating from the main goal for which it was established*. This is no vow of silence and does not amount to refusing to take sides in public debate. The new periodical, it continues, will have the ‘buenos y sensatos’ on its side, while those who criticise it will recognise themselves in the defects it highlights. However, without declaring what its *principal objeto* is (anyone who has read the periodical knows it to be: the Enlightenment of Peru), the writer is tentatively articulating what the *Mercurio* is *not* principally concerned with, namely, the official politics of the viceroyalty, which it will leave to the public authorities and to *gacetas*.<sup>10</sup>

In the continuation to the article, ‘Concluye el Discurso Antecedente’ (6 November), the *Mercurio* takes its distance from periodicals, such as its new, sister

paper in Santa Fe, which is happy to pass judgement on the recent peace between Spain and Great Britain (which it thinks will be short-lived and offer few benefits to Spaniards). Bearing in mind what has been said in the earlier edition about censorship and the Inquisition, the *Mercurio*'s response is telling: 'Repetimos que la imparcialidad y la moderacion hacen el carácter de nuestras producciones: y con este no es compatible ese espíritu audaz que osa citar á un temerario exâmen las determinaciones de los Gabinetes' (173). Impartiality and moderation characterise what we write. It is a clear statement of the need to steer clear of formal politics. In Habermasian terms, it is the negation of a political public sphere.

The position adopted by the *Mercurio* was articulated on 3 November (true philosophers are neither libertines nor fanatics but use their 'lights' for communal happiness) and is underscored in the final point of its résumé of the discourses offered by Santa Fe: 'los verdaderos derechos de la libertad del hombre, ennoblecidos, y conservados baxo el suave yugo de una legitima subordinacion y dependencia' (166). The rights of the freedoms of man are ennobled and preserved under the gentle yoke of a legitimate subordination, viz. to the public and spiritual authorities. Now, what cannot be determined absolutely from the above is whether the *Mercurio*'s statement of 6 November is a statement of belief (we believe periodicals, as opposed to *gacetas*, should not dissent from either the public or spiritual authorities), of tactical necessity (we had better believe it) or of a double consciousness (we believe we believe it, but we also believe in certain other things that might not coincide with the government's or the Inquisition's understanding of 'legitimate subordination').

However, above and beyond attempts to reconstruct the intended meaning of the term 'subordination' in this context, and before concluding hastily that this is merely the expression of a willingness to self-censor political opinions in an act of subordination to

Crown and Church, confirming in the process Whitaker's (1961, 5-6) view that the Hispanic Enlightenment was not about politics but rather practical problem-solving, it is worth considering the *Mercurio's principal objeto* invoked above. It is the difference between Habermas' political public sphere and a literary public sphere, a difference that belongs also to the internal history of the printed press (to the distinction between *gacetas* and *periódicos*).

### **Mercurial reason**

The *principal objeto* of the *Mercurio Peruano* would appear to be the Enlightenment of Peru. Enlightenment as instruction or making free from prejudice, and Enlightenment as shedding light on, making luminous (*OED*). The first edition, of 2 January 1791, begins thus: 'El principal objeto de este Papel Periodico, segun el anuncio que se anticipó en su Prospecto, es hacer mas conocido el País que habitamos, este Pais contra el qual los Autores extranjeros han publicado tantos paralogismos.'<sup>11</sup> Porras Barrenechea (1974, 133) writes of the *Mercurio's* desire to illuminate 'el suelo y la historia de la patria en gestación'. To illuminate the *suelo*, the *Mercurio* carries articles on the grand themes of commerce, education, mining, and intellectual discoveries, as well as on the smaller ones, such as machinery to alleviate the work done by blacks on cacao (13 February), the dearth of women among the periodical's subscribers (27 February), black slave congregations (16 June), music in the theatre (20 October), the *yaraví* (22 December), and the Bishop of Quito's edict on a new road (29 December). In one single issue, 2 February 1791, the *Mercurio* comments on the Lima population, free trade, cafés, hairdressers, the standard of living of the average person in Lima (they are better off these days), and the fact that Lima has more hospitals and schools than does Madrid. All of this, it says, is testament to the triumph of Enlightenment (*Ilustración*) (in truth, the picture is not so rosy, which is why the

*Mercurio* spends its time calling for Enlightenment rather than celebrating it).

As important as the present territory is its past history. The *Mercurio* is not so much bringing *the* Enlightenment to Peru (as though all the elements of enlightenment, such as reason, experience, observation, thought, etc, came from outside) as constituting a Peruvian Enlightenment. Having illuminated its present, it remains, then, to furnish the territory with a history. This is achieved by working through a local, Peruvian pantheon of thinkers such as Llano Zapata and institutions such as the Real Casa Hospital de Niños Expósitos de Nuestra Señora de Atocha and the Colegio of San Marcos. Then there is a more delicate matter for creoles. How to provide the *suelo* with a distinctive *historia* so that it may be a *patria* distinct from Spain? The single, most distinctive historical marker of difference from Spain is the region's indian past. It is clear from the comparative dearth of articles on indian matters that the subject is a dangerous one for creoles (praise the past too much and one hands legitimacy to the indians). Present-day indians remained an awkward subject, often a source of embarrassment, for contributors. Less so the Incas. The *Mercurio* could make the indians' Inca forebears into the *creoles*' ancestors, that is to say, into the ancestors of the *patria*.<sup>12</sup> And a *patria* with a distinctive—glorious, imperial—past is nothing less than a *nación*. Contributors to the *Mercurio* manage variously to call the territory 'Peru', 'Nacion', 'pais', 'patria', 'República', and even 'Imperio Peruano' (28 April, 7 August).

The simple point is this: the *Mercurio Peruano* does not appear to challenge or even to bring 'before the new forum of the public' (Habermas) 'las determinaciones de los Gabinetes' (that is for *gacetas*). But it does something arguably more political. It attempts to constitute a dramatic new forum. The *Mercurio* does not just report on an Enlightened *patria*, but rather attempts to construct—with all its blindspots—an

Enlightened *nación* through the very act of sharing knowledge in the public sphere which it is in turn striving to configure. To return to what was said earlier: no doubt political, economic, social and cultural factors help foster the conditions of production necessary for a public sphere. But an exclusively contextualist explanation elides the particular productive force of the act and actor of critical reason in the formation of the new context.

We are close here to François-Xavier Guerra's (2009) thesis on the new form of sociability, associationism, which, he claims, enters the Hispanic world with modernity. Not without its problems, Guerra's 'strong' reading holds that most social and political theories in the Spanish-speaking world up until the eighteenth century were based on an imaginary that took society to be structured by groups or corps—the traditional Hispanic 'sociedad estamental'. In this traditional order, the ties of social actors do not depend on the will of the individual but rather on birth into a particular class, pueblo or ethnic group. Individual will, such as it is, is subordinated to the will of the corporate body or estate. According to Guerra, this is not the case in modernity. Modernity knows associations of individuals—and this is the key point—*whose legitimacy comes from association itself*, that is, from the will of associates. Guerra (113) calls it the 'invention of the individual'. And he sees clearly—and this is one of his greatest insights—the profound kinship between the absolutist imaginary and the Enlightenment (and even revolutionary) imaginary that runs parallel to it. Both absolutism and Enlightenment share hostility towards corporate bodies and their privileges, and both, albeit for different reasons, make the individual into the normative subject of institutions and values. Notwithstanding certain irreducible problems with the archetypes at the root of Guerra's thesis (rather than say that a sociability of knowledge is *exclusive* to modern times, and therefore *alien* to Hispanic cultures—because, according to the archetype,



the pre-modern, corporatist Hispanic world shares none of the material or symbolic resources of the modern, individualistic world—it might be precisely more reasonable to say that it is *more dominant* in modern times), Guerra nonetheless draws us to the following possibility: that in the Sociedad Académica de Amantes de Lima that underpinned the *Mercurio Peruano* people came together (certain creoles and *peninsulares* came together), theoretically at least, as free individuals. ‘Sociedad estamental’, yes; but in one space at least, Sociedad *Académica*. No association without the will of the associates *qua* independent critical participants.<sup>13</sup>

Did the members of the Sociedad think their association responded to a different form of sociability? I am not sure. We have only hints. In the ‘Prospecto’ (I, xi), Don Jacinto Calero y Moreira writes that there are times when the markers of distinction are appropriate (he has just listed the great and the good who are the periodical’s subscribers), but not here. Here, he writes, the appropriate word is *Conciudadanos*, citizens. And ‘Philosophy’, to quote from a later edition, is the name of that knowledge that best fits the ethos of association: ‘Filosofía: [...] esa sublime virtud, cuyo objeto primitivo es la union y recíproco amor de los hombres, vinculándolos por el conocimiento de la dependencia en que mutuamente los constituye la opinion, y la necesidad’ (‘Nuevos establecimientos de buen gusto’, 26 May, II, 66). This is a petition for the autonomous power of knowledge and commerce. Men are bound together (though possible to read in the neutral form, as ‘humankind’, the subjects are almost always male), not by virtue of the sovereign’s will and not even by any social pact, but by economic need and a philosophical activity in the doing of which they learn of the dependencies involved in knowledge (*opinion*). There is another hint of this same idea in the great ‘dissertation’ on the history of commerce in Peru that runs across eight issues and invokes the social and political ties (*enlazes sociales y politicos*) which only

commerce can provide ‘Modernas Naciones’ with—it being understood that commercial ties are the equivalent of the philosophical ties that bind the members of an association into a different sociability.<sup>14</sup> But we shall end with the idea’s appearance in a *locus classicus* of the literary public sphere, the eighteenth-century café.

‘Rasgo histórico y filosófico sobre los cafés de Lima’ (10 February 1791) is a good example of the *Mercurio*’s patriotic empiricist historiography, committed to rescuing the ordinary and the abject from, as it puts it elsewhere, all those systematising histories and geographies of the country compiled ‘en las orillas del Sena, y del Támesis’.<sup>15</sup> It is in the ordinary fragments of the *patria*, despised by foreign scholars, that one can divine ‘the civil system’. The piece recalls how cafés in Spain were originally built on top of Alogerías and that coffee first came into Spain with the Arabs, along with a fragment of the Arabic language, the word *café* coming from *cahué* (in fact, originally *qahwa*). These useful houses first put down roots in Lima in 1771, before which there was no public café, partly because *mate*, owing to the care and time needed to prepare and consume it, was not compatible with the publicness (*publicidad*) of a shop. The first Lima café was established by Don Francisco Serio in Calle de Santo Domingo. The second followed a year later. Earnings from the cafés are thought to be considerable. Now there are six of them—many with billiards and *truco* tables, all selling iced drinks and other beverages and most being especially busy first thing in the morning and at siesta time.

Three things merit attention in respect of the question of the public sphere. 1) First, the ‘civil system’. Here is not the place to dwell at any length on this theme. Let us just say that, despite the presence in the piece of certain traditional Catholic topoi, the writer ultimately attributes the founding of establishments of the *polis* such as cafés to the *sistema civil de la República* (again this is clearly a creole, as opposed to indigenous,

project). Empirical study of cafés will reveal not the hand of God or even of the monarchy so much as the hand of the civil system. 2) Second, authority. The article both reminds us of the *ancien-régime* dimensions of Lima and gestures to a newer, more egalitarian order, the order of reason. On the one hand, its writer pays conventional homage to the representative of the *ancien régime*: ‘El Excelentísimo Señor Don Manuel de Amat Virrey entonces de estos Reynos, no se opuso a estos establecimientos, conociendo que su plantificacion y fomento cedia directamente en beneficio de la Sociedad’. Moreover, café gatherings exhibit only the most decorous behaviour: ‘las concurrencias de los Cafés’ are ‘practicadas con aquella moderacion, decencia y honestidad que son características del genio Peruano’. In translation: cafés will not disturb the existing order. On the other hand, however, these same *concurrencias* point to a different order of things, to other, more horizontal relationships between men. The Viceroy himself, the writer claims, would like such *concurrencias* to unite man with man, to develop a uniformity of character among men, and even to increase the circulation of goods and thereby contribute to the comfort of locals and to providing them with an innocent diversion:

como quiera que las concurrencias, practicadas con aquella moderacion, decencia y honestidad que son características del genio Peruano, unen el hombre al hombre, concilian la uniformidad del caracter, aumentan la circulacion y los recursos de subsistencia, contribuyen a la comodidad de los vecinos, y les proporcionan un recreo inocente. Tambien la Ciudad no miró con repugnancia la introduccion de esta moda. (I, 110)

This is the classic Enlightenment theme, with added *mate* and local street names, of cafés as the site of a new form of would-be egalitarian sociability based on reason.

3) Third and finally, there is the question of the publicness of the reason of the public sphere. What, the writer says, will those critics who want the *Mercurio* to be

merely a vehicle of adulation or a publiciser of private feelings (*sentimientos privados*) say of this account of Lima's cafés? He does not care. We do not write, he writes, just for the capital, or for the year 1791, but work for everyone and for posterity (*para la noticia de todo el mundo, y para la posteridad*). To that end it just might be that one day, in this or in the other hemisphere, news of the cafés of Lima is appreciated more than the oft-repeated accounts of wars, conquest and settlement (*fundacion*). Two themes intertwine here. First, the periodical confines itself neither to the private sphere of private feelings nor to the official—honourific-adulatory—discourse of the state sphere; rather, it is implied, it mixes the two spheres. This crossing of the private and the public coincides with Habermas' definition of the public sphere of civil society. Precisely in support of such a crossing, future historians, the author writes, will use cafés (rather than the grand affairs of state) as material with which to write the history of the capital, the history of how it thought and of how it began to emulate and even surpass (*sobrepasar*) the coffee houses of Europe. All of which means, of course: as material testifying to the greatness of the *sistema civil de la República*. Secondly, and as hinted at earlier, agents of what we have been calling the literary public sphere must necessarily countenance the possibility that their public works might always be unpublic, that is, not quite correspond to the majority view of the public sphere in its present configuration.<sup>16</sup> The true dimensions of their reason may only be recognised at a later time, the time of *la posteridad*. This reminds us that the (literary) public sphere is neither truly public nor truly spherical but always taking shape.

## **Conclusion**

The presence and nature of the *Mercurio Peruano* in Lima in 1791 suggests a 'sphere of private people come together as a public' and hints that concern not just over public affairs but over the very status of the *patria* was 'no longer confined to the authorities

but was considered by the subjects as one that was properly theirs'. On occasion—and we must be clear about this—patriotic historiography in the *Mercurio* is indistinguishable from the most traditional discourse of Empire.<sup>17</sup> At other times, however, even when the highbrow style of the *Mercurio* seems to reinforce another traditional civilising mission, namely, the High Literary civilising mission of creole and peninsular elites, the *Mercurio* shared (its) critical reason. Doubtless certain local and transatlantic political, economic, social and cultural conditions made possible the configuration of a Peruvian literary public sphere of sorts. But the latter was also made possible by this (heterogeneous) critical reason. Here was an instrument not just bringing news of the *polis* 'before the new forum of the public', as though the public already existed as an empirical subject before and in advance of all articulations of it, but rather endeavouring to constitute a public. In this delicate, always incomplete public sphere we encounter two further possibilities. First, an altered understanding of 'modernity' in the colonies: an uncertain, contradictory modernity (emancipatory and exclusive) at work before the official founding of the nation-state, taking shape in close proximity to the forms and functions of the *ancien régime*, and moving, like quicksilver, in the interstices of formal politics. Second, and going beyond Guerra, the possibility that in the exercise of critical reason what is called Enlightened modernity, with all its blindspots, has always already been under way. This is another way of saying that critical reason has always already been producing the conditions of and for the (literary) public sphere.

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<sup>2</sup> Poupeney-Hart (2010, 26) writes of 'la consolidación de una esfera pública'. Poupeney-Hart (2009) argues elsewhere that scholars have downplayed the variety of voices in the *Mercurio*, turning it into an exclusive matter of Peruvian national identity. For the link between associationism and the modern public sphere, see Guerra (2009).

<sup>3</sup> For criticisms that Habermas exaggerated the bourgeois and emancipatory nature of the concept, see Cahoun (1992, 4, 39). Habermas (1992, 425, 442) acknowledges both charges. For criticism of his blindspot on religion, Calhoun (1992, 36). For a more negative Frankfurt School view of the Enlightenment legacy, see Adorno and Horkheimer (1997).

<sup>4</sup> See Habermas (1999, 23) on the downward mobility of the 'genuine "burghers," the old occupational orders of craftsmen and shopkeepers'.

<sup>5</sup> All references to the *Mercurio Peruano* are to one of the three volumes (I, II or III) that collect together editions from the year 1791, available in digitized form through the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. These volumes are from the facsimilar edition published by the Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Lima, 1964. I have kept the original punctuation.

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- <sup>6</sup> Clément (73; see also 76-77) details the social composition of subscribers as 46.3% commoners or Third Estate (*estado llano*), 35.1% nobles, 16.3% clergy, 2.3% unknown.
- <sup>7</sup> This view of the lack of Enlightenment in the Hispanic world has been much challenged in recent times (see Saldaña 2006, Paquette 2008, Safier 2008, Stolley 2013, the essays in Astigarraga 2015). Sifting carefully through the debate, it seems that some of the challenges are really objections, not to the claim that the Hispanic world did not have an Enlightenment (a claim seldom heard), but to the *under-representation* of the Hispanic Enlightenment in *general scholarship* (Jonathan Israel has been particularly singled out in this respect). The key issue is not whether Spain and the colonies had an Enlightenment (the essays in Whitaker 1942 answered that question in the affirmative decades ago, though not before the *Mercurio Peruano* had) but whether or not aspects or practitioners of a Hispanic Enlightenment were in the vanguard of the Enlightenment in general, such that they should figure in *general scholarship* on the Enlightenment. One of the ways of revalorising the Hispanic Enlightenment is to challenge the ‘blueprint’ of the Enlightenment, especially the view that it was essentially opposed to religion. Cassirer (2009) did this brilliantly for the Enlightenment as a whole in 1932; Whitaker’s volume did it for a Hispanic ‘Catholic’ Enlightenment in 1942. Contemporary critics, such as Cañizares-Esguerra (2001), have often been noisier but less successful (because more contradictory) in this regard. See Lehner (2016) for a recent contribution to the question of a Catholic Enlightenment. I should like to thank both assessors for helpful comments and bibliographical suggestions.
- <sup>8</sup> The same idea appeared two months earlier, on 1 September 1791 (III, 318-319).
- <sup>9</sup> ‘El vulgo (¡já quantos grandes, graves, y ricos comprehende esta denominacion!’ (‘Rasgo histórico y filosófico sobre los cafées de Lima’, 10 February 1791, I, 109).
- <sup>10</sup> On the generic difference between *gacetas* (dedicated to political news) and *periódicos* (reserved for commentary on ‘literary’ or scientific matters), see Poupene-Hart (2010, 19).
- <sup>11</sup> A paradigmatic statement of Enlightenment values is to be found in ‘Historia de la Fundacion, Progresos, y Actual Estado de la Real Universidad de San Marcos de Lima’, 7 July 1791 (II).
- <sup>12</sup> See the editions of 30 January (I), 2 and 6 October (III) and 11 December (III) on present-day indians; and 17 March (I), 4 August (II), and above all the 21 and 25 August (II), on the Incas.
- <sup>13</sup> Habermas (36) writes of the *Tischgesellschaften*, *salons*, and coffee houses of Europe that, in *principle* (he is not oblivious to the rapid re-imposition of hierarchy that was often the



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reality), they ‘preserved a kind of institutional intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether.’

<sup>14</sup> ‘Disertacion Histórica y Política sobre el Comercio del Perú’, 20 March 1791 (I, 209).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Idea general del Perú’, 2 January 1791 (I, 1). This is from the opening page of the first article of the first edition.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Si quitasemos á nuestras acciones, y aun á nuestras ciencias todo lo que se dirige por pura opinion, conoceriamos quan fútil es la mayor parte de ellas’ (13 February, I, 116).

<sup>17</sup> See ‘Historia de las Misiones de Caxamarquilla’ (30 June, II) on the civilising mission of the Conquest.