GROUNDINGS
Volume 6, April 2013
www.gla.ac.uk/groundings

FRONT COVER

Zoe Grams

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WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM

University of Glasgow Chancellor's Fund

Students' Representative Council

PRINTED BY

J. Thomson Colour Printers, Glasgow

PUBLISHED BY

Glasgow University Dialectic Society

Glasgow University Union, 32 University Avenue, Glasgow, G12 8LX

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EDITORIAL

The overarching theme of this volume is ‘Voice and Power’, which gives rise to fundamental questions of interest across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Both ‘voice’ and ‘power’ are all-pervasive concepts, and frequently intermesh; at these points of intersection, conflict often arises. But each element can be configured and projected in numerous different ways, as the articles published here attest. This multivalent theme benefits from a multidisciplinary approach, as the authors often bring together diverse perspectives and methodologies to advance their arguments.

This year has been one of significant development for *Groundings*. The ten eclectic articles published in this volume, authored by undergraduate students at the University of Glasgow, were selected from the highest number of submissions to date; a formidable new record. It is fitting that this year, for the first time, authors and editors alike will receive recognition for their work in *Groundings* on their university transcript, through the Higher Education Achievement Report (appropriately dubbed ‘HEAR’).

The breadth of the articles, brought together by a common theme, is mirrored in the diversity of our authors, editors, and academic advisors, who united for this volume. The vast majority of those involved had not previously been connected to the Glasgow University Dialectic Society, which founded *Groundings* in 2007. Our theme is particularly apt considering the nature of this student organisation, whose raison d’être is to bring together many voices, with a firm belief in the power of discussion and debate. This journal is an extension of the Society’s aims and activities on campus and we are delighted, once again, to showcase the excellence of undergraduates at this university, and the power of their academic voice.

GROUNDINGS EDITORIAL BOARD

# Sufficient to have stood, or supposed to fall? The authority of God's voice in the fall of man in Paradise Lost

Emily Edwards

Milton's decision to anthropomorphise God by portraying him as a character in *Paradise Lost* has caused endless debate amongst critics. Many decry the attempt to humanise and understand the unknowable, but I intend to argue that Milton's efforts allow the reader to engage with a theological position. By giving God the power to speak, Milton opens up the possibility for discussion. This article will challenge the perception of a perfect God in *Paradise Lost* and, incorporating theological and literary criticism, advance the argument that God was guilty of deliberately creating a world that was bound to fall through an investigation of his justified voice.

Theologians have long debated the reasoning behind God's creation of a perfect world destined to fall as realised by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*. It is difficult to accept the logic of such a creation without questioning why an omniscient, omnipotent God would create a situation in which his perfect beings could not possibly withstand temptation. Answers to this paradox suggest themselves; firstly, that God intended man to fall. This can be anticipated and explained by *felix culpa*, the "fortunate fall", or it can lead us (particularly those not bound by faith) to question the purity of God's motives. Milton gives his God a voice, and thus an active role in defending his actions. I intend to engage with God's words to investigate the fall and the extent of his responsibility. God is a being of unlimited power and knowledge, whereas Adam and Eve are constrained by the limitations of their status as mortals. Thus, God's part in their fall may be read as an exercise in power, and his words as an explanation of his motivation.

In *Paradise Lost*, God acts and speaks with a literary voice. Milton's rendering of an unknowable God as a character has been the subject of extensive debate amongst critics. Although many critics have condemned Milton's attempt to humanise and understand God in the past, more recent post-Christian thought has accepted Milton's portrayal of God as wholly fictional. Milton's writing allows the reader to engage critically with the theological position Milton proposes, rather than submitting to unquestioning compliance. In presenting a God who speaks and defends himself, Milton implicitly opens up the possibility for disagreement and discussion. The modern reader can regard God from a purely literary perspective, free from Christian binaries of heresy or orthodoxy.

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Of particular interest to this discussion is God's speech in Book III, in which he presents the notions of free will, pre-destination, and the logic of their coexistence. God defends the creation of his subjects with free will insofar as they can individually choose to elevate themselves to a position of divine election. He anticipates the doubts and questions of a sceptical audience in defence of his actions and decisions. Milton permits God multiple opportunities to defend himself as one of the aims of *Paradise Lost* is to 'justify the ways of God to men'[1]. In presenting a self-justifying God, Milton provides the reader with opportunities for critical debate and reason for doubt. God's attempts to justify himself ask more questions about the absoluteness of his power than they answer.

An understanding of the historical context is vital to an informed reading of *Paradise Lost* and its intricacies. Milton was writing during a period of great theological debate, which centred around the Arminian-Calvinist controversy. John Rumrich eloquently summarises the two schools of thought as follows:

> The Calvinist asserts the unconditional predestination of elect individuals, who receive irresistible grace, and reprobate individuals, to whom this grace is denied […] The Arminian asserts conditional predestination to election and reprobation, contingent upon an individual's choice to accept or reject universal and resistible grace.[2]

Milton's theological position is difficult to categorically identify, as he altered his opinions throughout the course of his life and his writing. His depiction of God's justice, and his perspective regarding free will and predestination, conform principally to the more moderate views as set out in Arminian theories, rather than those of Calvinism. In *Paradise Lost*, however, his theology wavers to incorporate Calvinist ideas of the authority of God. Both Rumrich and Christopher Hill take issue with the passage in God's speech in which he declares: 'Some I have chosen of peculiar grace | Elect above the rest: so is my will'[3]. This, as Hill notes, is an example of 'Calvinist lines […] sandwiched between two unequivocally Arminian passages (l. 111-34, p.185-202)'[4]. Milton's God is inconsistent; initially he proclaims the freedom of man's will 'authors to themselves in all'[5], but within the space of a few lines he has reclaimed the power to predetermine the fates of all to either election or reprobation. Rumrich excuses God's contradiction by focusing on 'the Arminian twofold distinction'[6] that follows. He shows that despite initially declaring, 'the elect are set off

[1] J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, (ed.) G. Teskey (New York, 2005), Book I, l.26.
[2] J. Rumrich, *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge, 1998), 94.
[3] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l.183-184.
[4] C. Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London, 1997), 276.
[5] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l.126.
[6] Rumrich, *Milton and Heresy*, 95.

against the "sinful" rest', in reality 'the "rest" turn out not to be the reprobate, but the elect (who choose to accept grace) and the reprobate (who choose not to)'[7]. This analysis, while useful in disentangling what could otherwise be a perplexing contradiction, is by no means absolute. God's paradoxical words also demonstrate his inconsistencies as, anxious to defend himself on all fronts, he incorporates multiple aspects of theology in order to extend his appeal. The fact that we hear God's voice complicates his absolute domination as it permits us to question what we are told. By giving God a voice, Milton provides scope for a paradoxical God whose remaining power lies in the assumed obedience of his followers and their subordination.

Satan believes himself to be a fully Calvinist reprobate, and indeed, God implies this might be the case. In Book IV, Satan shows signs of remorse, in a scene that echoes Faustus' failed repentance in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus.* He asks, 'Is there no place | Left for repentance, none for pardon left?'[8]. Satan wants to be considered for forgiveness, but regards himself as beyond salvation. He also doubts his ability to remain sinless, were he forgiven: 'But say I could repent and could obtain | By act of grace my former state. How soon | Would heighth recall high thoughts?'[9]. If he were a Calvinistic reprobate, he would be unable to avoid falling again; if he were an Arminian one, he would be able to choose.

Empirical evidence further strengthens the case for God's complicity in the fall. God created Satan inherently evil, or in the knowledge that he would rebel against Heaven and pervert Adam and Eve. Despite this, God 'left him at large to his own dark designs'[10]. This negligent action is hastily justified when the narrator explains its purpose: that 'he might | Heap upon himself damnation'[11]. However, this reasoning seems to imply that mankind was sacrificed to teach Satan a lesson, which contradicts mainstream Christian theological doctrine. If the justification is unfounded, it is still unclear why God allowed Satan to wreak havoc. In Book X, the idea of God's negligence reappears when the narrator tells us that he 'hindered not Satan to attempt the mind | Of Man with strength entire and free will armed'[12]. Although this emphasises the failure of Adam and Eve to use their free will correctly, it also points out that God permitted the fall to occur. Such theological oversights contribute to the reader's growing sense of an imperfect God as he creates discord by contradicting himself. In an attempt to explain the existence of Satan, God compromises the supremacy of his power and, by inviting us to consider his motives, sets himself up to be challenged by sceptical readers.

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[7] *Ibid.*, 96.
[8] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, l.79-80.
[9] *Ibid.*, Book IV l. 93-95.
[10] *Ibid.*, Book I, l. 213.
[11] *Ibid.*, Book I, l. 215.
[12] *Ibid.*, Book X, l.8-9.

The primary purpose of God's speech in Book III is to outline Milton's interpretation of the debate between free will and predestination, to defend the world God created. God attempts to answer the fundamental questions Stanley Fish poses: 'how does one reconcile freedom of will with the absolute foreknowledge of the creator? How can actions which were foreseen be free?'[13] God endeavours to explain the delicate balance between creating a world that was 'sufficient to have stood'[14] but equally 'free to fall'[15]. Mankind was, according to God, created perfect, but once life began Adam and Eve were given the freedom to choose whether to follow God or to desert him. For Milton's God, the inclusion of free will is a vital element in the creation of mankind. When prophesising the fall, God defends himself saying: 'He had of Me | All he could have. I made him just and right, | Sufficient to have stood though free to fall'.[16] He is eager to emphasise that he fulfilled his duty, though man is not going to fulfil his. We only have God's word that the initial creation was made perfect, though we are presented with much evidence to the contrary. The fact of the fall is, for many, proof that Adam and Eve were not created strong enough to resist. The problem is that once we have begun to doubt the purity of God's motives, we can no longer accept his words as absolute authority. Rather, the fact that Satan was ascribed with enough unchecked power to bring about the downfall of mankind implies that God did not sufficiently support Adam and Eve, and may indeed have intended their fall, despite his claims to the contrary.

Book IX implies Adam and Eve were made with a tendency towards weakness, not 'sufficient' at all; Eve easily convinces Adam that they should separate and, soon after, Satan tempts Eve without excessive difficulty, as Milton notes, 'his words […] | Into her heart too easy entrance won'[17]. If God is omnipotent and omniscient, how could he have created humans with these frailties? God declares that mankind will 'easily transgress the sole command, | Sole pledge of his obedience'[18] as if it is their fault for being so wilfully subversive. On the contrary, with the knowledge that this one command would be broken so certainly, God could have altered his expectations to give Adam and Eve other chances to prove their love. He depends upon a negative system of proving allegiance, rather than positively rewarding declarations of faith. William Empson criticises God's parenting as 'neurotic, if nothing worse'[19]. In this instance, God exonerates himself of responsibility. His failure to alter Adam and Eve and make them more capable of resisting Satan adds to a

[13] S. Fish, *Surprised By Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost,* 2nd edn. (London, 1997), 209.
[14] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l.99.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.97-99.
[17] *Ibid.*, Book IX, l.733-734.
[18] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.94-95.
[19] W. Empson, *Milton's God* (London, 1961), 116.

growing sense that God desired Adam and Eve's fall. By refusing to interfere, God guarantees their downfall.

In *The Argument* of Book V, Milton states that God's warnings 'render man inexcusable'[20], but does not acknowledge that he is simultaneously excusing himself. God's tone is almost resentful when he tells Raphael, 'This let him know | Lest wilfully transgressing he pretend | Surprisal unadmonished, unforewarned'[21] A.J.A. Waldock notes the 'nervousness, insecurity and doubt' that he charitably attributes to 'an immaculate character on the defensive'[22]. For Empson, on the other hand, Milton's God is 'somehow embarrassing'[23], his speech in Book III betraying an 'uneasy conscience'[24]. Rumrich finds him 'aesthetically problematic and perhaps tyrannical'[25]. Fish, however, claims that the speech is 'not the defensive exclamation of an angry parent disclaiming responsibility for the sins of his offspring, but a logically necessary inquiry if the fact (of the fall) is to be placed in the context of total reality'[26]. He sidesteps the tonal flaws of the speech with his claim of its necessity, and if we subscribe to his reading of *Paradise Lost* as a morally instructive text, then God's speech does have its place. If we do not completely agree with him, the speech can be taken and criticised at face value. God protests too much for a completely innocent character; he anticipates the accusations before they have even been conceived, which merely serves to encourage reader criticism.

One of the many reasons why God speaks in Book III is to assert his power and ensure that he is attributed with the respect he believes he deserves. Milton sets the tone in his opening address, 'God is light'[27], before passing the power of speech to God to affirm his own strength and virtue. God admits he wants mankind to fall so that they too can acknowledge his power: 'to me owe | All his deliverance, and to none but me'[28]. This is an Old Testament God who wishes to frighten his subjects and give them a taste of the 'dark opprobrious den of shame, | The prison of His tyranny'[29] to ensure their constant allegiance in the future. For those in thrall to Biblical teachings, such a declaration is in keeping with the notion that God deserves to be worshipped. On the other hand, other readers may react like Satan, defying the pressure

[20] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book V, l.150.
[21] *Ibid.*, Book V l.243-245.
[22] A.J.A. Waldock, *Paradise Lost and Its Critics,* 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1959), 102.
[23] Empson, *Milton's God*, 9.
[24] *Ibid.*, 116.
[25] J. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (Cambridge, 1996), 68.
[26] Fish, *Surprised By Sin*, 65.
[27] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l.3.
[28] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.181-182.
[29] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.58-59.

to 'bow and sue for grace | With suppliant knee'[30]. We are forced to 'stare God full in the face'[31], and few like what they see. We see justification for William Blake's famous claim that Milton was 'of the Devil's party'[32] as God comes across as an egotistical tyrant, bitterly setting up his creations for a fall so they will return to him begging for forgiveness and acknowledging his power. In order to crush future rebellion, God wants mankind to be aware of its frailty and its properly subordinated place within the religious universe.

God reiterates several times that despite his foreknowledge, there are limitations to the extent of his omnipotence. In reference to Satan's rebellion in Heaven, he remarks that 'They themselves decreed | Their own revolt, not I'[33]. In this he emphasises the idea of personal responsibility, demonstrating that obedience is a matter of choice. He continues; 'If I foreknew | Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault | Which had no less proved certain unforeknown'[34]. In the case of the fallen angels, God was more at fault than with Adam and Eve; it was God's nepotism in promoting his Son that angered the angels, 'fraught | With envy'[35], into rebellion. He disassociates his foreknowledge from events that occur with no evidence to support his claim other than his word. In the Bible, the word of God is the absolute truth; in a work of fiction such as *Paradise Lost*, it is merely the utterance of one character. Fish takes issue with such a reading, believing that the reader, like Adam and Eve, has the option to accept or reject the Bible as truth, as understanding the poem as 'ultimately a choice between the word of God and the structures reared (self-defensively) by the reader's reason'[36]. He is countering God's argument of the importance of individual reason when it works against God's word. How were Adam and Eve supposed to understand such complex thought still debated by modern critics?

Within his speech in Book III, God takes pains to shift the onus of responsibility away from himself; he accepts the glory of perfect creation, but does not believe himself liable for the tragic outcome. This is particularly evident in the following lines: 'the high decree | Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained | Their freedom: they themselves ordained their Fall'[37]. God congratulates himself upon the creation of man's freedom while locating the blame for the fall completely with the fallen themselves. The repetition of 'ordained' also has

[30] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.111-112.
[31] Waldock, *Paradise Lost and Its Critics*, 99.
[32] Blake, W., 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' in (ed.) Teskey, G., *Paradise Lost*, (New York, 2005), 389.
[33] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l.106-107.
[34] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.181-182.
[35] *Ibid.*, Book V, l.661.
[36] Fish, *Surprised By Sin*, 216.
[37] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l.126-128.

implications of destiny as Milton suggests a paradox of an inescapable fate and the unexercised power of God to stop the fall from happening.

Milton briefly hints at the doctrine of *felix culpa* in God's speech of Book III. Man is created likely to fall so he can benefit from learning to repent and to choose good and evil. God asks his listeners, 'Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere | Of true allegiance, constant faith or love | Where only what they needs must do appeared, | Not what they would?'[38]. He allowed the fallen angels (and Adam and Eve) the freedom to choose their allegiances, and they fell. In this way God is challenging accusations of tyranny, for if his subjects freely choose to worship him, there can be no doubt of the purity of their intentions. In permitting his subjects to know evil, they can consciously choose the path of righteousness. God continues to bemoan the tediousness of unintelligent subjects: 'What pleasure I from such obedience paid | When will and reason […] made passive both, had served necessity'[39]. 'Necessity' is key as God emphasises the importance of faith as an active choice, rather than a compulsory duty.

In his speech in Book III, God declares that the fall will ensure his subjects 'pray, repent, and bring obedience due'[40]. He admits that the fall is intentional, thereby subscribing to the notion of *felix culpa*, but directly contradicts his previous claims that the fall is completely mankind's 'own'[41] fault. By emphasising the importance of his rules and the consequences of breaking them, God does two things: theologically, he paves the way for his punishments which will be executed in the name of disobedience, while simultaneously warning humans of their limitations to prevent them from 'vent'ring higher than [their] lot'[42]. Thus God establishes dramatic tension. The reader has both been told and already knows that the fall will occur; God simply reiterates the consequences that will occur once it has happened. God's voice has become more than just a theological authority; he also takes on a narrative power. For Albin Lesky, destiny has 'an accountable power which […] has produced in dramatic art the kind of tragedy of fate'[43]. Knowing the consequences of the fall, we can do nothing but observe with dread as Adam and Eve bite into the forbidden apple.

Burton Hatlen, by contrast, defends and commends the struggle between good and evil: 'Without Satan, God's universe remains static, immobile- and, from a human perspective, intolerably dull. What sort of God would want to sit around for eternity as His angels sing

[38] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.103-106.
[39] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.107-110.
[40] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.190.
[41] *Ibid.*, Book III, l. 97.
[42] *Ibid.*, Book IX, l. 690.
[43] A. Lesky, *Greek Tragedy* (London, 1965), 114.

hymns in His praise?'[44]. This notion recalls God's words, 'What pleasure I from such obedience paid?'[45]. Apparently, it is not only mortals who are susceptible to boredom. Taken together, these ideas support the notion that God permitted the existence of Satan in the knowledge that he would create an opportunity for dramatic and moral tension.

The most contentious implication of this discussion is perhaps also the most intriguing: the notion that God, the 'author of all'[46] is just that; an author. If we accept Fish's thesis that Milton intends the reader, as 'a participant in the action'[47], to identify with Adam, Eve and Satan, by logical extension this means that Milton, as author and creator, is synonymous with God. Both are omnipotent creators of their worlds yet, despite foreknowledge, both are powerless to alter the events that will unfold. God claims to be unable to interfere because he has allowed his protagonists the freedom of choice, whilst Milton cannot change the outcome of the well-known story. If both God and Milton are authors, their intentions transcend categorisation of good or evil. They wish to create a dramatic work, to justify the paradoxical creation of a perfect world bound to fall. God exercises his authority to ensure the outcome is dramatically and emotionally fulfilling.

The notion that God searches for 'pleasure'[48] is expounded in the following lines: 'Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled | Made passive both, had served necessity'[49]. He begrudges the banal passivity of any beings that would simply follow his orders out of necessity rather than their free choice. Although we are warned not to think 'that Heav'n would want spectators, God want praise'[50], there is too much evidence to dismiss the idea. Once the notion of God's perfection has been called into question, the scope for subversion and intrigue becomes apparent. If God is prone to boredom and craves entertainment that will give him pleasure, his purpose for creating Adam and Eve not quite 'sufficient'[51] takes on a new dimension. God created man not just because he wanted to prove the moral hierarchy of religion and truth, but also because he wished to create a scenario that would unfold dramatically.

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[44] B. Hatlen, 'Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, a Challenge to the Fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman's Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*' in (eds.) M. Lenz & C. Scott, *His Dark Materials Illuminated* (Detroit, 2005), 89.
[45] *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l.374.
[46] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.374.
[47] Fish, *Surprised By Sin*, lxxii.
[48] *Paradise Lost*, Book III, l. 107.
[49] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.109-110.
[50] *Ibid.*, Book VI, l.676.
[51] *Ibid.*, Book III, l.99.

Many critics take issue with Milton's attempt to portray God at all; Waldock notes that Milton was bound to make errors in his depiction of God because 'perfection, quite strictly, is unportrayable' [52]. Part of the lasting entertainment of the poem, however, is rooted in the character of God, because we are able to engage with and criticise him. Indeed, Empson refers to Blake and Shelley, 'who said that the reason why the poem is so good is that it makes God so bad'[53]. For critics who desire more than just a retelling of the Bible, Milton provides an opportunity for debate and intrigue.

That it is now possible to consider God as a character and dramatic force, rather than a deity, signals the fundamental shift that literary appreciation has experienced in the last century. We now operate in a principally post-Christian society, which means that critics now have the freedom to discuss God rationally rather than being forced to conform to accepted notions of doctrinal theology. God's function as creator in the poem shifts the focus of his actions away from a debate over inherent virtue or evil and more towards a rational discussion of exercised authority. He may not have used his power purely to bring about evil, but God does not pursue good either. The crux is that the situation was crafted so it was highly likely Adam and Eve would fall to create the drama necessary for *Paradise Lost*.

God either permitted the fall to occur because he foresaw the fortunate outcome and believed mankind would benefit more from salvation, or because of malicious intent. The doctrine of *felix culpa* is a labyrinthine argument with which to justify God's actions and defend the paradoxical creation of a world that was certain to fall. Although it may be theologically comforting to believe that God's love for humanity lies at the roots of his plans, *Paradise Lost* does not show this to be entirely the case. Liberated from the shackles of religious imperatives, the suggestion that God's intentions are anything other than pure are not as reprehensible as it would have been in Milton's era. The reasoning behind the fall is much easier to comprehend if it is attributed to egotism: God wanted to exert his power over his subjects.

[52] Waldock, *Paradise Lost and its Critics*, 97.
[53] Empson, *Milton's God*, 68.

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# The non-linear politics of language: history, ideology and assemblages in the context of Catalonia under Franco

Claire Green

This article will examine the relation between power and language in the case of the repression of Catalan by Franco's dictatorship. This is an issue of contemporary relevance, as the Catalan independence and language movements are coming to increasing prominence within the Spanish state. To analyse why language was of such concern for Franco's regime, I will look at the relation of language and power in a broader theoretical sense, and how these concepts manifested themselves in the particular Catalan case. Finally, I will examine two events which serve as intersections of the myriad forces at play in Franco's repression of Catalan. An analysis of the political nature of language in this context must allow for the multi-faceted, non-linear interrelations of history, institutions and socio-cultural factors, and so will draw on the discussions of language in the work of Manuel de Landa, and Deleuze and Guattari.

## INTRODUCTION AND CATALAN CONTEXT

As calls for Catalan independence grow, along with a rise in Catalan language use, it is important to understand the historical context that preceded and influenced this movement. The Catalan case can be seen to have reverberations far wider than the borders of Spain: the relationship between power, nationalism and minority languages is an issue that affects many modern nation-states, democracies or otherwise. Language can be understood as both national tongue and as the act of speech or enunciation, and the context of Franco's Catalonia is an intersection of both these features: the Catalan language was attacked, and language as speech functioned as both weapon and target of this repression. Language simultaneously shapes and symbolises conceptions of reality, ideology and identity and, as such, is strongly interrelated with history, culture and power. This significance is amplified when both manifestations of language coincide, that is, in the case of speech concerning a minority language. The implications of language for thought, identity and power relations make it an especially important issue for totalitarian or fascist regimes, whose ideology centres on control and homogeneity. Therefore, an analysis of the political nature of language in this context must allow for the multi-faceted, non-linear interrelations of history, institutions and socio-cultural factors and, as such, will draw on the discussions of language in the work of Manuel de Landa, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

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Franco's regime focused on establishing a homogenous conception of reality, a project interconnected with language at every level, and therefore one that must be understood within a wider historical context. Following the end of the Spanish Civil War in April 1939, the new dictatorship's objective was to establish a unified, Catholic, Castilian-speaking Spain.[1] As such, the country's minority languages, particularly Catalan and Basque, were heavily persecuted until Franco's death and the beginning of the transition to democracy in 1975. In pursuit of the regime's goal, 'free speech, free press, right of assembly and trial by jury'[2] were sacrificed, and a powerful propaganda machine espoused the benefits of the new state. Throughout this ideological project ran a conflict between the centre and the periphery, a tension also present in much of pre-Franco Spanish history. Although the Franco period was the most dramatic instance, language as ideological battleground has been a feature of Spanish history for hundreds of years.

Catalan began to develop as an independent language in the ninth century, with Castilian taking precedence in what would become Spain from 1085 onwards.[3] Catalonia was the 'dominant power'[4] within the Crown of Aragón, which it joined in 1137, but this prominence ended when Catalonia was brought under Castilian command in 1469.[5] This loss of power was exacerbated by the exclusion of Catalonia from trade with the Americas, as the Spanish monarchy 'made no political distinction between Catalans and foreigners.'[6] The conquest of the Americas not only weakened Catalonia, but strengthened Castilian power and language, in spreading both to the New World. Moreover, Spain was the first Romance language-speaking country to attempt to standardise its language, in 1492, the same year as Columbus' arrival in the Americas.[7] This reflects the connection between political homogenisation and the concretisation of language, as the standardisation 'was intended to be a companion of the Empire… and should spread Spanish… along with the rule of the Spaniards,'[8] and the power of the Catholic Church. A standardised language is an important tool in the creation of political hegemony, entailing 'one homogenous identity for all citizens,'[9] an objective particularly relevant during the conquest of the Americas. Given these factors it is perhaps not surprising that in 1715 official use of Castilian became mandatory in Catalonia.[10]

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[1] J.M. Maravall, *Dictatorship and Political Dissent* (London, 1978), 5.
[2] H. Johnston, *Tales of Nationalism: Catalonia 1939-1979* (New Jersey, 1991), 39.
[3] M. De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* (New York, 1997), 199-200.
[4] J. Díez Medrano, *Class, Politics and Nationalism in the Basque Country and Catalonia* (Ithaca, 1995), 22.
[5] *Ibid*., 22.
[6] *Ibid*., 28.
[7] De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History*, 206.
[8] E. Haugen, 'National and International Languages', in (ed.) A.S. Dil, *The Ecology of Language: Collected Papers* (Stanford, 1972), 260.
[9] De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History*, 212-213.
[10] Díez-Medrano, *Class, Politics and Nationalism in the Basque Country and Catalonia*, 35.

The coinciding of the wish to spread political and religious hegemony to the Empire's "peripheries", with the imposition of an official language upon all the communities within Spain, shows how significant language was for the consolidation of power. The emphasis on shared language, history and religion was similarly integral to Franco's rule. Franco had fought in a colonial war in Morocco,[11] and the ideology of imperialism persisted in the nature of his centralised governance, despite Spain's international isolation.[12] On taking power, Franco eradicated the autonomy of Catalonia and the Basque Country;[13] a foregrounding of the centre over the periphery that was part of a wider cultural project imposed by the regime, based on both unity and fear. To fully understand this repression of the Catalan language by the Franco regime, it is important to first analyse the relationship between language and power more broadly.

## LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

The significance of language for totalitarian regimes begins with its role in the development of subjectivity. Without language one would have no concepts, only immediate sensory experience. An unpleasant sensation is registered by the brain if the body suffers damage, but 'you learned the concept "pain" when you learned language.'[14] Language, therefore, is not only the means of expressing thoughts; it is the building blocks they are made from. Furthermore, language creates the subject that thinks: the concept of pain, rather than the primary sensory experience, relies on awareness of the 'I' that feels it, which, without language, would be impossible. Language is also public in nature, and shapes the subject's self-awareness through interaction with the external world. Words are, Bakhtin argued, 'social events,'[15] and the meaning of every word is located in the world outside of the self. It is therefore much too reductive to think of language as merely the sounds or symbols used to convey thought. The subject, words, the material world and the other subjects within it are engaged in a constantly fluctuating, reciprocal relationship that creates, defines and shapes all of them interdependently.

This can be seen in the role language plays in group identity, through the relationships it establishes between past and contemporary speakers. According to Borges 'every language is an alphabet of symbols the employment of which assumes a past shared by its interlocutors.'[16]

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[11] S.G. Payne, *The Franco Regime: 1936-1975* (Wisconsin, 1987), 625.
[12] J. Tussel, *La España de Franco* (Madrid, 1989), 87.
[13] Payne, *The Franco Regime*, 231.
[14] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, 1953), 118.
[15] E. San Juan Jr., 'Bakhtin: Uttering the "(Into)nation" of the Nation/People' in (eds.) San Diego Bakhtin Circle, *Bakhtin and the Nation* (Pennsylvania, 2000), 118.
[16] J.L. Borges, *The Aleph* (London, 1998), 129.

As such, using a language involves an engagement with all its past speakers, whose decisions and experiences shaped its present incarnation. Therefore, entering into a chain of language use is an ideological process that conveys information about the identity and group membership of the speaker. This is particularly evident in the case of a bi-lingual speaker, with two past chains of use to choose from. Additionally, language is not only an ideological discourse between past and present users, but a related, non-linear discourse between contemporary speakers. De Landa writes that 'the concept of social obligation is crucial to an understanding of… language itself,'[17] as relations between speakers and concurrent norm enforcement are not only a function of language but part of its substance. Moral, political and cultural judgements are conveyed by and affect the language considered appropriate in a certain context.

This means that different styles of speech both bind group members together and identify them as members to others. The more a linguistic marker is used, the more important it becomes to the group's identity, until it is no longer merely a signifier but part of the norms the group is bound by. Bourdieu describes how 'the categories according to which a group envisages itself, and according to which it represents itself and its specific reality, contribute to the reality of this group.'[18] Language, due to its non-linear relation to historical and cultural values, is a prime example of a signifier of group identity, or reality, becoming part of that identity itself. Just as the interaction of a subject with others through language develops that subject's sense of self, a group's identity becomes stronger through interaction with those that do not share in it. This can be seen in the prominent role language often plays in nationalism, highlighting the role of an "other" in the relationship between language and group development, and the association of language with heterogeneity.

As a result, totalitarian states often attack language as enunciation, through censorship both official and tacit. Holquist describes how 'in the totalitarian state, language seeks to drain the first person pronoun of all its particularity,' in the sense that the "I" becomes subsumed into the "we" of the nation[19]. This aim is even stronger in terms of minority languages, given the greater degree of autonomy they imply. An attack on minority languages by a totalitarian state is an attack on the particularity of social groups, who disrupt the image of national unity that such states wish to perpetuate. If one language is indicative of shared values, history and beliefs, then a multiplicity of languages suggests cultural fragmentation. Moreover, the values carried by language, as well as its fundamental role in the shaping of both individual and group identity, make it a potent force for political resistance. Bourdieu writes that 'political

[17] De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History*, 191.
[18] P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, 1991), 133.
[19] M. Holquist, *Dialogism* (London, 1990), 52.

subversion presupposes cognitive subversion,'[20] and any cognitive process is inseparable from language. The public nature of language makes this especially threatening and, in this sense, Bakhtin's 'social events' become a vehicle not just for interaction but for dissidence. In attempting to control language, a totalitarian state is not only attempting to control resistance, but its very means of production.

This relationship between language and political dissidence leads many authoritarian regimes to practice what Bourdieu calls 'usurpatory ventriloquism, which consists in giving voice to those in whose name one is authorised to speak.'[21] This is in a sense what happens in a democracy, but is particularly pernicious in a regime when the "authorisation" has been extracted by force or coercion. Totalitarian regimes first remove the voice of individuals or certain groups, and then insert their own voice into the vacuum. 'Usurpatory ventriloquism' is part of a wider process aimed at the 'monopolisation of collective truth,'[22] which constructs a narrative of cultural and social unity that underpins the totalitarian state. Propaganda slogans, the press, teaching, and the distinction between major and minor languages are at the forefront of this process of hegemonising conceptions of reality, as enforcers of the symbolic violence 'which pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning.'[23] These elements, along with other public acts of speech and writing, can be called the collective assemblage of enunciation,[24] which is 'what must account for the social character'[25] of a society, and is particularly significant for the exertion of symbolic violence in a totalitarian or fascist dictatorship.

The collective assemblage of enunciation derives from assemblage theory, which posits a 'multi-scaled social reality,'[26] consisting of assemblages, or 'wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts.'[27] Crucially, on this model all objects 'must be thought of as existing at the same ontological level differing only in scale.'[28] Therefore, a particular group made up of human beings is no more or less "real" than the individual human beings that constitute it. A flat ontology does not reduce the power of entities such as institutions to the sum of their constituent physical parts, and allows for the changing, fluid, nature of

[20] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic* Power, 128.
[21] *Ibid*., 211.
[22] *Ibid*., 212.
[23] S. Žižek, *Violence* (London, 2009), 1.
[24] M. Lazzarato, 'The Concepts of Life and the Living in the Societies of Control', in (eds.) M. Fuglsang & B.M. Sørensen, *Deleuze and the Social* (Edinburgh, 2006), 173.
[25] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London, 1987), 89.
[26] M. De Landa, 'Deleuzian Social Ontology and Assemblage Theory', in (eds.) M. Fuglsang & B.M. Sørensen, *Deleuze and the Social* (Edinburgh, 2006), 251.
[27] M. De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society* (New York, 2006), 5.
[28] M. De Landa, *Deleuze: History and Science* (New York, 2010), 5.

assemblages. This more holistic or 'rhizomatic'[29] conception acknowledges the meaning located in the relations and interactions between entities, not just inherent to the entities themselves. This is particularly important when analysing language: the significance of language is based in the connections between subjects, groups, political institutions and other bodies, not in the constituent elements themselves, and these connections are inherently fluid.

Furthermore, language not only connects but builds these assemblages; the 'transmission of linguistic materials helps maintain the identity of social assemblages across time much as the flow of genetic materials helps to preserve the identity of biological assemblages,'[30] as a result of the values and norms that language carries. This emphasis on multiplicity and enmeshed institutions, bodies and interactions, acknowledges that language cannot be investigated as an independent entity, only as interlinked with every other aspect of reality. As Deleuze and Guattari write, 'a method of the rhizome type… can analyze language only by decentring it onto other dimensions… A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence.'[31]

## THE COLLECTIVE ASSEMBLAGE OF ENUNCIATION AND FRANCO'S CATALONIA

As stated earlier, the Franco regime was obsessively focused on the creation of a unified Spain, with one culture, one Church, one conception of the nation's history, and one language. The collective assemblage of enunciation was integral to this mission, and the state propaganda machine and press created a climate of intimidation that made widespread resistance almost impossible. The rhetoric underpinning this propaganda was that any seemingly harsh measures enacted by the dictatorship were part revenge for the 'Jewish-Bolshevik-Masonic conspiracy'[32] of the Second Republic, and part redemptive process bestowed upon the nation by the patriarchal Franco. Preston writes that 'Franco's propagandists presented the executions, the overflowing prisons and camps, the slave-labour battalions and the fate of the exile as the scrupulous yet compassionate justice of a benevolent Caudillo,' showing how important the collective assemblage of enunciation was in directing and justifying the acts of physical entities, those which pertain to the 'machinic assemblage.'[33]

[29] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 8.
[30] De Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 44.
[31] *Ibid*., 8.
[32] P. Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York, 2012), 520.
[33] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 98.

In addition, the collective assemblage of enunciation not only perpetuated the regime's program of repression, but was also engaged in concealing its violent extremes. Díaz-Balart writes that the repression attempted to hide the brutal origins of Francoism,[34] that is, the coup against the Second Republic and the atrocities committed during and after the Civil War. This can be seen as part of the establishment of what Lacan called the 'quilting point', which acts on the constitutive elements of an ideological field and ''quilts' them, stops their sliding and gives them meaning.'[35] For example, the meaning of a coup, or an idea such as 'family', is not fixed but depends upon ideological and political context. In 1940s Spain the meanings of socio-cultural signifiers such as these would have been quite different had the Republicans won the Civil War. Therefore, in order to solidify their takeover of power, Francoist propaganda had to align their meaning according to the quilting point of totalitarianism. The quilting point also anchors the meaning of past signifiers; 'it retroactively submits them'[36] to this overarching imposition of meaning. It is clear that the early Franco dictatorship was concerned not just with creating a new society but with controlling the meaning of past events; Preston writes that 'through endless reiteration in the press, in schools, in children's textbooks and from church pulpits, a single historical memory was created and disseminated over three and a half decades.'[37] As Preston shows, this non-linear project was enacted through the collective assemblage of enunciation, that is, through language.

The retroactive imposition of meaning is particularly relevant in the case of Catalan. Catalonia, especially Barcelona, was associated with trade unionism and anarchist tendencies for much of the nineteenth century.[38] Later, the democratically elected Second Spanish Republic allowed Catalonia more autonomy and linguistic freedom than the preceding dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, albeit within a restricted framework. This greater autonomy resulted in Catalonia's 'steadfast support'[39] for the central government. This factor and the high levels of left-wing and anarchist resistance in Catalonia during the Civil War undoubtedly influenced the heavy repression imposed upon the region by Franco. This can be seen as part of the attempts to retroactively establish the quilting point of fascism, in pursuit of a unifying historical memory. The use of the Catalan language, once linked to a democratic, self-governing and progressive movement, was now a signifier of disloyalty and social breakdown.

[34] M.N. Díaz-Balart, 'El porqué y el para que de la represión', in (eds.) M. Álvaro Dueñas, *et al*., *La Gran Represión: Los Años de Plomo del Franquismo* (Barcelona, 2009), 21.
[35] S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, 1989), 95.
[36] *Ibid*., 114.
[37] Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*, 520.
[38] S.G. Payne, 'Catalan and Basque Nationalism', Journey of Contemporary History, 6.1 (1971), 22.
[39] Johnston, *Tales of Nationalism*, 36.

The view of Catalan as dangerous to a unified Spain influenced a range of repressive measures. Franco's regime prohibited the use of Catalan in advertising, books and schools,[40] dramatic performances, religious celebrations and even maps.[41] The seven Catalan-language newspapers were closed; Catalan names could not be given to children, and a concerted effort was made to downgrade the common perception of Catalan from a language to a dialect.[42] Notices appeared proclaiming 'Speak Christian' and 'Don't bark; speak the language of the Empire', not only denigrating Catalan but connecting the language to anti-clericalism,[43] and the Franco regime to the centralist, Catholic empire. Slogans such as these show that, while the repression enacted upon the Catalan language by Franco's regime was the most extreme instance, it should be understood within a wider historical context of tension between centralist and autonomist forces, exacerbated by the dictatorship's particular ideological field.

## INCORPOREAL TRANSFORMATIONS: LANGUAGE AND RESISTANCE

Nevertheless, the 1950s and 1960s saw a weakening of state control of the population, which was reflected in Catalonia's linguistic landscape. The press and publishing industries were given a greater degree of freedom, although they were still expected to exercise self-censorship[44], which was required throughout Spain, but particularly important in Catalonia. Balcells notes that 'the same ideas when expressed in Catalan aroused greater wrath… than if they had been expressed in Spanish'[45]. This shows how, despite the loosening of the dictatorship's social control during this period, the Catalan language was still associated with dissidence and danger. The greater degree of openness strengthened a burgeoning Catalan language movement, but this resistance quickly came into conflict with the repressive forces of the regime; greater language rights may have been permitted, but only if they did not challenge state power directly.

This tension can be seen in two related examples, known as the 'Caso Galinsoga' and the 'Sucesos de Palau'. In 1959, the editor of La Vanguardia newspaper, Luís Martínez de Galinsoga, left a Barcelona church shouting 'Catalans are shit'[46] in protest at the service having been conducted in Catalan. Galinsoga, a prominent Francoist, had been given the position of editor following the end of the Civil War. As such, his words were extremely controversial, and sparked a campaign to have him removed from his post. This campaign

[40] K.A. Woolard, *Double Talk: Bilingualism and the Politics of Ethnicity in Catalonia* (Stanford, 1989), 28.
[41] Johnston, *Tales of Nationalism*, 30
[42] Woolard, *Double Talk*, 28-29.
[43] Johnston, *Tales of Nationalism*, 29.
[44] A. Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism: Past and Present* (London, 1996), 148.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] *Ibid*., 140.

took the form of pressure on the newspaper's advertisers, public destruction of the newspaper, and demands for a boycott. The protest was ultimately successful: in February 1960, Franco's cabinet dismissed Galinsoga from his position.[47] This outcome was a clear victory for Catalan resistance against Francoist language repression.

However, the success was short-lived. In May that year an event was planned in Barcelona's Palau de la Música Catalana to commemorate the centenary of the Catalan poet Joan Maragall's birth, and 'perhaps to pour oil on nationalist waters stirred by the Galinsoga affair.'[48] Franco would be attending the events, which were intended to include a rendition of Maragall's El Cant de la Senyera, the public performance of which had been prohibited since 1939 due to its Catalan nationalist content. This unusual situation prompted some who had been involved in the anti-Galinsoga campaign, including future President of the Generalitat Jordi Pujol, to circulate heavily critical flyers.[49] The flyers highlighted the repressive nature of the regime and ended by stating that Franco 'not only is an Oppressor, but a Corruptor.'[50] The performance of Maragall's song was subsequently removed from the event's program. Ultimately, Franco did not attend but a number of government ministers did and, when the crowd began to sing the prohibited piece, the police reacted with extreme force.[51] Pujol, who had not attended the event but was widely believed to be responsible for the flyer, was detained along with around twenty others, tortured, and sentenced to two and a half years in prison.[52] The regime may have been attempting to present an image of greater openness, but this brutal reaction meant it was 'shown in its true colours'[53] once again.

These events show how volatile the situation of the Catalan language remained even when certain rights had been extended to it. Galinsoga's associations with Franco meant that protesters were not just fighting for the right not to be insulted, or to celebrate mass in their own language, they were 'attacking a surrogate of the generalissimo.'[54] This was a valuable outlet, as the Palau incident demonstrated that the consequences could be very different if Franco was attacked directly. Catalan has a proud literary tradition that made the issue of the Cant de la Senyera so significant, and the installation of Galinsoga as editor of La Vanguardia had been part of the violent construction of Franco's Spain: these examples show that a complex interrelation of historical forces, power relations and institutions was at play in the repression enforced. Furthermore, these events angered the middle classes, who had

[47] Johnston., *Tales of Nationalism*, 127-128.
[48] *Ibid*., 129.
[49] Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism: Past and Present*, 140-141.
[50] Johnston, *Tales of Nationalism*, 129.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] Tusell, *La España de Franco*, 224.
[53] Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism: Past and Present*, 140.
[54] Johnston, *Tales of Nationalism*, 128.

previously 'helped maintain the government's claim to legitimacy',[55] and as such had a profound impact on the nature of Catalan resistance to the dictatorship.

It is clear from these cases how language was not only the target of repression, but the means of enforcing and of resisting it. The key controversial aspects centred on linguistic expression: Galinsoga's statement, Pujol's flyer, Maragall's hymn. Nevertheless, their significance was based in a meshwork of institutions of power, historical trends and cultural entities. Moreover, the effects of these statements were not limited to the linguistic sphere: they involved changes in physical bodies, such as the dismissing of Galinsoga and the imprisonment of Pujol, and the change in Catalanist resistance. Deleuze and Guattari call such statements 'incorporeal transformations;'[56] acts of speech which have an instantaneous effect on physical interactions, for example the immediate change in status of a person when a judge pronounces them guilty of a crime.[57] While the statements made by Galinsoga and the flyer were incorporeal, they sparked immediate changes in status, with clear physical effects. These changes in status relate to both the collective assemblage of enunciation and the machinic assemblage; De Landa writes, therefore, that 'linguistic replicators affect reality by catalyzing'[58] incorporeal transformations. Linguistic acts such as those involved in the Galinsoga and Palau incidents are the points where the myriad influences and bearings upon the significance of language intersect with its equally numerous effects, in a non-linear, non-hierarchical interaction.

## CONCLUSION

It can be seen, therefore, that Francoist repression of Catalan, and the relationship between language and power more broadly, must be understood as part of a wider, interrelated historical, ideological and political context. Catalonia under Franco is not only a point where both the significance of minority languages and of language as enunciation intersect. It is also an entrance into the meshwork of elements that underpinned all actions of the Francoist state: tensions between centralist and autonomist forces; associations between Catholicism, imperialism and Castilian; discipline, nationalism and the primacy of the homogenous collective. The influence of these factors was fluid, and one aspect may have been more prominent at a given time: enforcing discipline was more directly influential than imperialism in the arrest of Pujol. However, discipline is required for homogeneity, influenced by the idea of imperialist political dominance, a factor inextricable from cultural, religious and linguistic

[55] *Ibid*., 130.
[56] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 89.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History*, 203.

implications. It is for this reason that the bearing of such factors as ideology and power upon Francoist repression of Catalan should be understood holistically: as elements of a constantly changing, non-linear grouping of interrelated and interdependent parts.

This holistic interpretation is as important for the how of the repression of Catalan as the why: many aspects of the collective assemblage of enunciation, such as the press, and of the machinic assemblage, such as the police, were interdependent in the enforcement of ideology, as the Galinsoga and Palau incidents show. The interpretation is also supported by the current strength of the Catalan language; its prominence is less in spite of the brutal measures of the Franco dictatorship and more because of them, precisely due to the brutality's interrelation with historical and ideological forces. The pre-existing tensions that influenced the ideology of the regime, such as that between the centre and the periphery, did not end with the death of the dictator. The Franco era became part, albeit a very extreme part, of this vacillating trend, and, as such, the transition to democracy entailed greater regional autonomy and minority language rights. The regime functioned as a repressive 'other' in relation to Catalonia, meaning that, far from destroying the Catalan language, its brutal project of eradication in fact created the conditions for it to thrive, along with related ideological forces.

In 1936, in an altercation with fascists in Salamanca, the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno warned them 'You will win, but you will not convince.'[59] This is especially significant in the Catalan context. While the regime was dedicated to convincing the population that Catalan was simultaneously threatening and illegitimate, as part of a wider historical and political meshwork Franco's winning of the Civil War and the brutal repression this entailed ultimately contributed to Catalan's present legitimacy and power. The relationship of history, ideology, nationalism and power relations to language meant that Franco sowed the seeds of his own failure; in terms of Catalan especially, he won but he could never convince.

[59] Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust*, 175.

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# Voicing freedom: the meaning of Uhuru in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*

Ailsa Hemphill

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* is set in Kenya in 1963, the year the country became independent from the British. It depicts both colonisers and colonised, and explores the workings of power both before and after independence, unsettling the notion that gaining independence can be equated with gaining freedom. Drawing from the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin's concerns about the dangers of conflating status with freedom, this article reflects on the workings of colonial and neo-colonial power in the novel. There are parallels between the coloniser/colonised dynamics of *A Grain of Wheat* and those of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as in both texts the language of freedom is used ambiguously to the benefit of the coloniser. Ngũgĩ's novel demonstrates that a nation may be declared free in a way which in fact works to conceal the lack of freedom of its people, and that voicing freedom in a negative as opposed to a positive sense exposes the violation of fundamental freedoms.

> It is only the universal craving for status and understanding, further confounded by being identified with the notion of social self-direction, where the self to be liberated is no longer the individual but the 'social whole', that makes it possible for men, while submitting to… authority… to claim that this in some sense liberates them.[1]
>
> *- Isaiah Berlin*

Novelist, playwright and activist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was born in 1938 when his native Kenya was under British rule, and he lived as an adolescent through the Mau Mau War of Independence (1952-1962). His third novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) marked a transformation in the ideological focus of his writing, as he came to centre on the collective rather than the individual. He has described this novel as simultaneously 'a celebration of independence' and a warning about those pitfalls of national consciousness cautioned against by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).[2] It paints a troubled and ambiguous picture of freedom, or Uhuru[3], in the wake of Kenyan independence in 1963 as the narrative is haunted by ghosts of the colonial past that refuse to go away, and illustrates how the dangers of nationalism which Fanon wrote about can be an upshot of conflating the search for freedom with the search for status, or social unity. In this article I aim to show, following the arguments of the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin, that the novel calls for freedom to be distinguished from unity and

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[1] I. Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969), 158.
[2] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London, 1993), 3.
[3] 'Uhuru': Swahili for 'freedom'.

to be conceived of in a negative, rather than positive, sense. While both colonial and neo-colonial powers use the language of positive freedom in ways which obscure and distract from the absence of the people's most basic freedoms, it is through expressing and understanding freedom as a negative concept that this absence can be unmasked. Also in accordance with Berlin, the novel supports a sort of value pluralism, as it shows that a balance must be struck between freedom and unity – between Uhuru and Umoja[4] – in Kenya's fight for independence. It is through recognition of this balance that freedom can be voiced in a meaningful way.

Isaiah Berlin first gave his lecture 'Two Concepts of Liberty' four years before Kenya 'regained her Uhuru from the British,'[5] at a time when he perceived that at no previous point in modern history had 'so large a number of human beings, both in East and West… had their notions, and indeed their lives, so deeply altered, and in some cases violently upset, by fanatically held social and political doctrines.'[6] He identified within Western political philosophy an 'open war… being fought between two systems of ideas,'[7] each of which yield disparate and conflicting answers to 'the central question of politics—the question of obedience and coercion.'[8] This divergence, according to Berlin, is the result of two different concepts of freedom or liberty: negative liberty (or 'freedom from') and positive liberty (or 'freedom to').[9] The first of these is involved in the answer to the question: 'What is the area within which the subject—a person or a group of persons—is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?'[10] The latter, in contrast, is involved in the answer to the question: 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?'[11] Negative freedom comprises only the sphere in which a person is not coerced, where there are no external constraints. Positive freedom, on the other hand, concerns the sphere in which one is one's own master, where one is liberated not only from external oppression, but from internal 'spiritual slavery, or slavery to nature.'[12] This is the idea of freedom associated with Enlightenment philosophers like Spinoza, Kant and Rousseau; it involves not only overcoming domination

[4] 'Umoja': Swahili for 'unity'.
[5] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London, 2002), 199.
[6] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 119.
[7] *Ibid*., 121.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] Gerald MacCallum has influentially disputed that two different concepts of freedom can be distinguished in this way, arguing instead that "freedom is always both freedom from something and freedom to do or become something". See G.C. MacCallum, Jr., 'Negative and Positive Freedom', *The Philosophical Review*, 76.3, (1967), 319. However, for the purposes of this essay, which aims to show how the language of freedom can be used to obscure a fundamental lack of it, Berlin's distinction is a useful one.
[10] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 121-2.
[11] *Ibid*., 122.
[12] *Ibid*., 132.

by others but overcoming one's own 'unbridled passions.'[13] The real self is 'identified with reason,'[14] and it is the realisation of this higher self – through liberation from one's baser, 'empirical' or 'heteronomous'[15] self – which constitutes freedom in the fullest sense. It is this latter, positive concept of freedom which Berlin cautions against, as it inevitably involves recognising the expertise of those who are "more rational" than others, and subsequently threatens a descent into tyranny**.** When freedom becomes equated with realising the rational self, there arises a justification in coercing recalcitrant persons to follow their 'latent rational will'[16]: to use Rousseau's renowned oxymoronic maxim, they may be 'forced to be free.'[17]

John Thompson, the British administrator of Thabai in *A Grain of Wheat*, is party to this Western school of thought that lionises reason. This is apparent when he is pleasantly surprised upon encountering two African students who in dress, speech and intellect are 'no different from the British'[18]:

> Where was the irrationality, inconsistency and superstition so characteristic of the African and Oriental races? They had been replaced by the three principles basic to the Western mind: i.e. the principle of Reason, of Order and of Measure.[19]

To be English[20], for Thompson, is 'basically an attitude of mind'.[21] The British mind is a rational mind, and a rational mind knows what is best, thus the growth of the British Empire – the beacon of reason – is 'the development of a great moral idea.'[22] His vision of 'the just ordering of human society' requires that all Africans be educated in accordance with the British tradition. Here Ngũgĩ's British colonist echoes the thoughts of the enlightened tyrant that Berlin warns against: 'they would not resist me if they were as rational and as wise as I and understood their interests as I do.'[23] Thompson is 'influenced by the French policy of Assimilation'[24]; however he sees it as a mistake to assimilate 'only the educated few'.[25] Instead he advocates a more comprehensive approach, as even 'the peasant in Asia and Africa must be included in this moral scheme for rehabilitation.'[26] His ideology is thus one of all-

[13] *Ibid*.
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 133.
[17] J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Available: <http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon_01.htm> [Accessed: 5/12/12], Book 1, Chapter 7
[18] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 52.
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] John Thompson uses "English" and "British" interchangeably.
[21] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, p. 53
[22] *Ibid*., p. 52
[23] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 133.
[24] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 53.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] *Ibid*.

inclusive paternalism; Ngũgĩ presents this character as the archetypal colonialist who represents his 'inhumanity in the form of virtuous activity.'[27] As Patrick Williams notes, 'John Thompson signifies colonial power's readiness to slip from the hegemonic mode (getting Africans to believe in British culture, and adopt it willingly) to the coercive mode (beating them when they are unwilling).'[28] The self-titled 'man with destiny'[29] lurches down the same slippery slope from paternalism to despotism which Berlin saw as the 'devastating effects'[30] of much Western philosophy.

As Thomas Cartelli notes, John Thompson's 'initial conception of Africans as both different and unequal expressly echoes Prospero's insistence on Caliban's incapacity to master civil behaviour in *The Tempest*.'[31] Thompson fleshes out his 'great moral idea' in a manuscript entitled 'PROSPERO IN AFRICA',[32] drawing a link between his own paternalistic ideology and that of Prospero. Shakespeare's colonist character describes his slave, Caliban, as:

> A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
> Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains
> Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost[33]

For Prospero, Caliban will always be a slave to nature whether or not he is a slave to man. It is his view of the native as a barely human 'freckled whelp, hag born'[34] that allows him to couch his dominion over him as paternalism, as 'pains/Humanely taken'. Like John Thompson, Prospero slips from this paternalism to force, as he advances from treating Caliban with 'kindness' to 'stripes' [35] in the face of his obstinacy.

In *Moving the Centre: The Cultural Struggle for Freedom* (1993), Ngũgĩ acknowledges that Shakespeare gave to Caliban 'the capacity or voice to say 'no'.'[36] However, despite having great 'energy of protest and self affirmation,'[37] Caliban ultimately says "yes" to being a slave to a master, albeit not his original master. Despite his fierce wish that 'All the infections that the sun sucks up/ From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall,'[38] it takes only a taste of the drunken

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[27] T. Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National formations, postcolonial appropriations* (London, 1999), 97.
[28] P. Williams, *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o* (Manchester, 1998), 67.
[29] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 52.
[30] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 119.
[31] Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare*, 91.
[32] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 53.
[33] W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Cambridge, 2002), IV.i.188-190.
[34] *Ibid*., I.ii.283.
[35] *Ibid*., I.ii.345.
[36] Ngũgĩ, *Moving the Centre*, 15.
[37] *Ibid*., 17.
[38] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II.ii.1-2.

butler Stephano's 'celestial liquor'[39] for him to declare this other migrant to the island 'a brave god'[40] who he will kneel to. In an act of defiance against the 'tyrant'[41] Prospero, Caliban switches his allegiance to this new 'wondrous man'[42] who offers rewards for his labours, joyfully singing:

> No more dams I'll make for fish,
> Nor fetch in firing
> At requiring,
> Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish,
> Ban, ban, Ca-caliban
> Has a new master – get a new man
> Freedom, high-day, high-day freedom, freedom high-day, freedom.[43]

In the face of Stephano and the jester Trinculo repeatedly calling him a 'monster' and 'moon-calf', [44] echoing Prospero's epithets 'born devil' and 'hag-seed', [45] Caliban jubilantly pronounces his loyalty to his 'new master' Stephano. It is with a sense of triumph – indeed with the 'energy of protest and self affirmation' that Ngũgĩ attributes to him – that Caliban conflates liberty with slavery, 'high-day freedom' with having a 'new master'. As Berlin discerns, the 'triumph of despotism is to force the slaves to declare themselves free,'[46] and this is exactly what Caliban does in replacing Prospero with his parodic surrogate Stephano. Parallels may be drawn here with Fanon's warnings against those nationalist parties who, in a newly independent and 'free' state, 'mobilise the people with slogans of independence, and for the rest leave it to future events.'[47] Here Shakespeare's islander is mobilised with an idea of freedom which is in reality no different from slavery; in the same way the 'empty shell'[48] of national consciousness allows the national middle class to assume the oppressive role previously played by the colonial power, and neo-colonial power is able to take shape under the banner of the nation's freedom. In *The Tempest*, the master/slave relationship is not overturned, but simply replaced. A similar warning is present in *A Grain of Wheat*: the people are mobilised with slogans of Uhuru, and yet this masks the fact that dominance and inequality still prevail in independent Kenya. It is for this reason that the novel calls for conceiving of freedom negatively, in a way which categorically shows the oppressed to be less free than the oppressors. Only in this way can a declaration of freedom be meaningful.

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[39] *Ibid*., II.ii.99.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Ibid*., II.ii.139.
[42] *Ibid*., II.ii.140.
[43] Ibid., II.ii.156-162
[44] Ibid., II.ii.
[45] Ibid., IV.i.188; I.ii.365.
[46] Berlin, 'Two concepts of liberty', 165.
[47] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington (London, 2001), 121.
[48] *Ibid*., 119.

On the day of independence in *A Grain of Wheat*, the Uhuru celebrations are tinged with a feeling of unease. Though John Thompson has now resigned 'to get away before Uhuru,'[49] even after the Union Jack is quickly lowered a minute before midnight on 12 December 1963, there is still talk of 'seeing the ghosts of the colonial past… haunting Independent Kenya.'[50] At the same time as crowds gather in Nairobi stadium to cheer the new National Anthem and the flying of the new Kenya flag, there is a sense in the village of Thabai that people are 'waiting,'[51] like 'a woman torn between fear and joy during birth motions'.[52] It is General R., elected to speak at Rung'ei market place in lieu of the people's hero Mugo, who the crowd turn to in apprehension. The General himself is, however, in a state of agitation as he is disturbed by an apparition of the 'mocking face of the Reverend Jackson,'[53] a black man who preached against Mau Mau in churches, and he is aware that marching the streets around them is the King's African Army, 'the very colonial forces who had been doing on the battlefield what Jackson was doing in the churches.'[54] The Uhuru celebrations – and, accordingly, the notion of Uhuru itself – are thus haunted, disturbed by phantoms and remnants of the colonial yesterday.

The chapter which begins with the statement 'Kenya regained her Uhuru from the British on 12 December 1963'[55] very quickly calls into question whether Uhuru can be placed so neatly and objectively in terms of linear history. Indeed, *A Grain of Wheat* as a whole defies simple linear history. The narrative is multi-dimensional, as stories unfold into other stories, and throughout the novel ghosts and spirits continually appear as disruptive forces that disturb a simply chronological conception of independence following the departure of the colonial power, of freedom following the end of domination. It is this problem of colonial ghosts which leads Anne McClintock to object to the term 'post-colonial', viewing it as 'prematurely celebratory.'[56] According to McClintock the term rehearses the 'Enlightenment trope of sequential, "linear progress"', reorienting the world 'around a singular, binary opposition: the colonial as opposed to the post-colonial.'[57] The notion of the post-colonial is 'haunted by the… figure of linear "development".'[58] In the same way, the notion of Uhuru is haunted by apparitions from the past which disturb a picture of linear progress. *A Grain of Wheat* presents a challenge to understanding history in terms of chronological progression, disputing

[49] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 55.
[50] *Ibid*., 216.
[51] *Ibid*., 199.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] *Ibid*., 218.
[54] *Ibid*., 216.
[55] *Ibid*., 199.
[56] A. McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism" *Social Text*, No. 31/32 (1992), 88.
[57] *Ibid*., 85.
[58] *Ibid*.

the idea that Uhuru could be absent one day then wholly regained the next. Colonial phantoms throughout the novel, from the dead agricultural officer Mr Rogers who 'haunts the railway station,'[59] to the grey-haired Dr Lynd who flits 'around the compound… a solitary being, like a ghost,'[60] and the three spectres faced by Karanja as he stands on the train platform, serve as a constant reminder that there are still oppressive forces at work, that Kenya has not yet fully 'regained her Uhuru'.

The novel's ghosts are like the 'untimely spectres'[61] described by Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1993); however, unlike Derrida's phantoms that 'one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back'[62], Ngũgĩ's novel seems to offer up hope of new beginnings in the exorcism of the ghosts of the colonial past. In order for this exorcism to occur, it appears that the notion of Uhuru must be re-examined and redefined, its perimeter circumscribed so as not to allow any colonial ghosts back in. It is in light of this that the enigmatic yet emotive way in which General R. appropriates the term 'Uhuru' in his speech is problematic. On the day of independence, he attempts to articulate history in terms of 'sequential, "linear" progress', to give weight to the importance of the celebrations as he stands before the crowds at Nairobi proclaiming:

> I know even now this war is not ended. We get Uhuru today. But what is the meaning of 'Uhuru'? It is contained in the name of our movement: Land and Freedom. Let the Party that now leads the country rededicate itself to all the ideals for which our people gave up their lives.[63]

As Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech.'[64] The General's assertion that 'the war is not ended' seems to directly contradict his following proclamation 'We get Uhuru today,' so that the question 'what is the meaning of Uhuru?' resonates unanswered through the novel. Contained in his speech are the empty slogans warned against by Fanon; this is testified to by the Warui's later feeling when he looks back on the day of independence, as he describes it as 'like warm water in the mouth of a thirsty man.'[65] Ngũgĩ's novel is mindful of the reality of the history of the post-colonial state in Kenya as 'one in which peasants and workers grow poorer, where women are exploited, and where the national cultures are trampled upon by a

[59] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 33.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 44
[61] J. Derrida, 'Specters of Marx' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, (ed.) V.B. Leitch, 2nd edn., (London, 2010), 1743.
[62] Derrida, 'Specters of Marx', 1743.
[63] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 217.
[64] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 159.
[65] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 237.

powerless bourgeoisie;'[66] thus it is significant that both the villagers Wambui and Warui remark that they have not seen General R. since he spoke at the meeting and, sitting alone in her hut, Wambui is 'lost in a solid consciousness of a terrible anti-climax to her activities in the fight for freedom.'[67] She evokes the solitary voice of Yeats's 'Meditations in a Time of Civil War' (1928) who, from the 'empty house of the stare,'[68] laments, 'We are closed in, and the key is turned/On our uncertainty'.[69] Both Yeats's empty house and the hut in the village are comfortless places in the wake of a fight for freedom which 'fed the heart on fantasies'[70], as the villagers contemplate the same task of survival ahead of them as before, involving 'the market tomorrow, and fields to dig and cultivate,'[71] and 'children to look after',[72] it is clear that the General has proclaimed an illusory Uhuru, and freedom has not been gained in any real sense.

According to Fanon, in order to eschew the pitfalls of national consciousness, the masses must be educated politically, which – unlike John Thompson's project of instilling Western principles or the General's project of making a clear-cut split between 'heroes' and 'traitors and collaborators with the colonial enemy'[73] – is 'to make the totality of the nation a reality to each citizen. It is to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience to each of its citizens.'[74] The crowd at Rung'ei are not, however, ignorant of their history, as they talk of 'land alienation, Waiyaki, Harry Thuku, taxation, conscription of labour into the white-man's land, the break with the missions, and, oh, the terrible thirst and hunger for education.'[75] Ngũgĩ does not present the people of Kenya as the national counterpart to Caliban, who happily offers to lick the shoe of his new master who promises not to let him 'suffer indignity'.[76] It is thus all the more poignant that the General fails to capture their hopes in his speech. *A Grain of Wheat* is not a warning against national consciousness in itself, but rather a call for a national consciousness which is, in Fanon's words, 'the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people.'[77] It is Mugo's confession that puts an end to the meeting, as the celebrated hero's emergence as a traitor calls into question

[66] J.A. Ogude, 'Ngugi's Concept of History and the Post-Colonial Discourses in Kenya', *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 31.1 (1997), 94.
[67] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 239.
[68] W.B. Yeats, 'Meditations in a Time of Civil War', *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Kent, 1994), 173.
[69] Yeats, 'Meditations in a Time of Civil War', 173.
[70] *Ibid*.,174.
[71] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 238.
[72] *Ibid*.
[73] *Ibid*., 217.
[74] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 161.
[75] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 214.
[76] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, III.ii.32.
[77] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 119.

the people's sense of unity, and they leave dispirited, 'away in different directions.'[78] With a salient swiftness, the national consciousness that General R attempts to summon with his talk of Uhuru and 'the heroic tradition of resistance of our people'[79] seems nothing more that the 'empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been'[80].

The importance of unity is a crucial theme in the novel, and it is the character of Mugo, the loner and hermit who has betrayed the hero Kihika to the authorities, who serves to demonstrate how individual freedom must at times be forfeited in order to preserve a united front**.** Abdulrazak Gurnah argues that although Mugo insists on freedom to live as he chooses, 'in the argument of the novel to live alone is a pathology, and to live in a community, especially one as historically oppressed as this, requires a sacrifice of those needs.'[81] When Mugo hears Uhuru songs, every word carries 'a piercing irony'[82] for him; the songs of freedom shame him because he has placed his own personal freedom above the needs of the community. Berlin's value pluralism, which recognises the need for trade-offs between values like freedom and solidarity, was in part formulated on the basis of those 'oppressed classes or nationalities'[83] who do not demand 'simply unhampered liberty of action for their members.'[84] Rather, what is wanted is:

> simply recognition (of their class or nation, or colour or race) as an independent source of human activity, as an entity with a will of its own, intending to act in accordance with it… and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as being not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free.[85]

For the subjugated nation, freedom entails unity and unity entails freedom; these are two interrelated yet separate ideals and a balance must be struck between them. Indeed, in *Moving the Centre*, Ngũgĩ recalls being a student singing, 'Uhuru cha cha cha… Umoja cha cha cha…' in anticipation of the creation of an East African federation.[86] It is both Uhuru and Umoja which represent important ideals for Ngũgĩ, and this is salient in *A Grain of Wheat*.

The paradox of colonial languages, which Ngũgĩ discusses in his 1986 book *Decolonising the Mind* (his 'farewell to English as a vehicle'[87] for his writing) requires a negotiation of the

[78] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 219.
[79] *Ibid*., 217.
[80] Fanon, *The Wretched Earth*, 119.
[81] A. Gurnah, 'Introduction' in *A Grain of Wheat* (London, 2002), xi-xii.
[82] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 231.
[83] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 156.
[84] *Ibid*.
[85] *Ibid*., 156-7.
[86] Ngũgĩ, *Moving the Centre*, 168.
[87] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth, 2004), xiv.

competing pulls of Uhuru and Umoja: the language of the colonisers becomes 'the common language with which to present a nationalist front against white oppressors,'[88] while at the same time constituting an oppressive Eurocentric force on the native culture. As Aimé Césaire affirms, cultural dominance is dangerous as great possibilities are wiped out in 'societies drained of their essences, cultures trampled underfoot.'[89] In other words, cultural and linguistic domination is a violation of freedom. This is illustrated in *The Tempest*, as when Miranda endows Caliban's 'purposes/With words,'[90] her thought that she has bestowed him with the freedom *to* express himself obscures her violation of his freedom *from* cultural dominance. This again serves as an example of where freedom is understood positively (as freedom *to*), it can become indistinguishable from self-realization. Part of Berlin's value pluralism, the view that 'the ends of men are many,'[91] means that freedom as one of these ends must be understood in the negative sense, as freedom from interference from others. He argues that positive freedom, in its focus on the realisation of the self, entails a danger of understanding the social whole in terms of a self which is to be liberated, and this 'makes it possible for men, while submitting to the authority of oligarchs or dictators, to claim that this in some sense liberates them.'[92] When General R. announces '[w]e get Uhuru today,' he is really making a claim about a social status, rather than a claim about freedom, and in doing so obscures the reality that in many ways the people are not yet free. Freedom must thus be understood negatively, as circumscribing a realm which is free from interference from others, in order to make sense of it and to exorcise Uhuru – as distinct from Umoja – of its oppressive colonial ghosts.

Ngũgĩ believes that 'Children are the future of any society,'[93] and thus *A Grain of Wheat* ends with Gikonyo's decision to 'carve a woman big – big with child.'[94] The novel thus closes on a note of hope: a hope for a new generation who may sing songs of freedom without irony, who will be driven not by any empty and haunted slogans of Uhuru, but with a determination to both inculcate solidarity in the community and end the violation of fundamental freedoms.

[88] Ngũgĩ *Decolonising the Mind*, 7.
[89] A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. J. Pinkham (London, 1972), 6.
[90] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii.357-358.
[91] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 169.
[92] *Ibid*., 158.
[93] Ngũgĩ, *Moving the Centre*, 76.
[94] Ngũgĩ, *A Grain of Wheat*, 243.

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# Traditions of reaction: post-revolution art from the People's Republic of China

Marcus Jack

Surveying the recent history of art produced in China reveals a path which is well-worn. The voice of the Chinese artist is at once reactive and cyclical; forever circumscribing a conception of Chineseness itself. In a continuum of political tumult, we witness the intersection of art and authority, and it is in these instances that rhetoric is formed. The dynamic of artist and state oscillates endlessly; herein, we observe the restless banding and disbanding of past and present forms. Played out in aesthetic experience, Chinese art is characterised by the confluence of associations with and withdrawals from the very traditions upon which it is founded. Inquiry will chart the chronic flux of the artist's voice, amid swelling politic and enduring reform.

Since the assumption of full control in mainland China in 1949, the Communist Party of China has had immeasurable influence in shaping the production of contemporary artistic voices. Fluctuating between violent reformism and periods of political conservatism, China itself is at the centre of virtually all of its own creative dialogue. The Chinese cultural identity has become the product of tensile oppositions: past and present, empowerment and disinheritance, compliance and rebellion. Investigating the complex chronology of Chinese contemporary history reveals certain moments of art historical intrigue. It is here, where we may locate the intersection of art and politics, the specific instances at which voice confronts power: Mao's Cultural Revolution and its reverberations, the protests of Tiananmen Square, and capitalist reformation. The artist's voice must always be formed within an artistic discourse; it reflects upon an aesthetic continuum. Herein, an inextricable link is drawn between tradition and identity.

Tradition holds an intrinsic resonance in discussions of Chinese modernity, indeed to divest the nation from its history is to obscure realities. As such, any observation of the artist's voice, the aesthetic of reaction, must too be a contemplation of tradition, its performance, implications and mythologies. Concentrating on image production after 1966, this analysis will endeavour to configure the artist's voice as a force that engages with authority through the mechanics of tradition; a formal and ideological impulse.

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## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION (1966-1979)

### 'The symbols that highlight modern Chinese art' [1]

From the early adoption of communism, official art was assimilated with the Soviet model of Social Realism, a result of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance in 1950. Artistic forms were endowed with purpose, a mode captured by the great murals of the 50s, and explosion of woodblock propaganda. The fever for neutering vernacular idiosyncrasy in provincial art, aided by the concurrent degradation of higher forms (deemed 'bourgeois spiritual pollution'[2]) saw the inception of a single standard, popularised as New Year Painting. Trends in artistic development from 1949 can be simplified as a prequel to what would be fully manifested during the Cultural Revolution.

Art produced between 1966 and 1976, from the start of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution until his death, reflected China's vehement self-suppression of 'feudal' intellectualism more than in any other period before or since. The 'Decade of Catastrophe' condemned 'pluralist creative visions'[3] breeding a singular artistic direction; the reflection of a contemporary revolutionary ideology. Artists were castigated and ancient forms, especially ink painting, victim to ruthless political iconoclasm. Mao's doctrine consigned artistic production to propaganda purposes and limited subject matter exclusively to the Eight Model Operas – pseudo-moralistic works engineered to serve the communist ideology and purge feudalism from the arts.

Tradition, understood as a visual quality, was forcibly smothered under Mao. The characteristics which developed: 'red, bright and vivid'[4] or 'redness, glory, and light'[5] – reduced art of this period to a formula of false optimism. *Follow Closely Chairman Mao's Great Strategic Plan,* 1968 (fig. 1) is an archetypal example of such practices. 'Not so much a political leader, but a god or a Buddha'[6], the work by an anonymous hand exudes a farcical grandeur. Borrowing figuration from Socialist Realism, Mao rises from the swelling proletariat of red. Although a theoretical rejection of tradition, the influence of antiquated doctrines, perhaps below consciousness, is crucial to the construction of the work. Flattened planes of lurid colour, use of white void space and the value of calligraphy, evidenced in

[1] L. Ci, *Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, 2010), 163.
[2] A. Weiwei, 'The Multiple Predicaments and Upturns of Chinese Contemporary Art' in (eds) B. Fibicher & M. Frehner, *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection*, (Ostfildern, 2005), 13-14.
[3] M. Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China: 1949-1984* (Hong Kong, 1998), 169.
[4] *Ibid*.
[5] Ci, *Chinese Painting*, 156.
[6] Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China*, 148.

Mao's clutched brush, motion a reliance upon consecrated iconography. An aesthetic in transition, the artist rescinds tradition, yet is unable to perform without it, perhaps telling of greater disunities.

Zhou Shuqiao's *Hunan Communist Group*, c.1970 (fig. 2), illustrates the Chinese manner of cultural adoption. Utilising Last Supper iconography the work bears 'striking similarities to European religious painting'[7]. Compositionally, a young Mao stands elevated as the head of an apex, citing the practices of western history painting as manifest in Ingres or Delacroix. Galikowski claims that only the 'portrait of Marx on the wall and the pile of scattered political tracts [...] tell us that this is not a depiction of a Christian Saviour.'[8] Embodying absolute perfection in official art, the work is prototypical in its abject refusal of the antiquated voice. Succeeding the expressive hand is the new tradition of Chinese realism, an optical vocabulary which alternates between official exaltation and condemnation restlessly into the millennium.

As a conceptual purge, traditional mediums were still appropriate if applied with a message of modernity, industry and propaganda. Whilst reducing the artistic liberties of the followers of old schools, the Cultural Revolution can also be credited with providing an extraordinary platform for the dissemination of image. Artistic production became an industry itself governed by the necessity to achieve high targets.[9] Hierarchy and opportunity unbridled by class prejudice bred a hypercompetitive environment and called for dynamic maximums within the limits of the framework that the Cultural Revolution imposed. One such work, *Fire Trees, Silver Flowers, The Sky Never Darkens* by Chen Shifa, Xie Zhiguang, Xu Zhiwen, Yan Guoli and Zhang Guiming, c.1972 (fig. 3) exists to defy claims of total artistic castration during the Cultural Revolution. A tribute to the collaborative murals of the 1950s, like Fu Baoshi and Guan Shanyue's *This Land So Rich in Beauty,* 1959, a sense of epic romanticism glorifies industry, assimilating machinery with natural majesty. Agriculture is rejected as an outmoded component of the Nationalist machine. Even the poetry of the work's title adopts a scheme of quasi-spiritual beautification. The visual practices of tradition remained distinct. The work was a new composition of elements already known; flying white, handscroll narrative direction and active brushstrokes to convey energy. Activist criticism deems this a style of 'weasels giving birth to rats – each generation worse than the last'.[10] However, as an engineered movement we should understand that the works which gained national

[7] *Ibid*., 147.
[8] *Ibid*., 148.
[9] *Ibid*., 81.
[10] Weiwei, 'The Multiple Predicaments', 13.

consumption were the greatest artistic expressions achievable given the climate of restrictions. The voice is operating successfully within the compress of limitation.

The campaign of Revolutionary Realism was not met without derision. Ink painting had been the most revered form in China for over one thousand years[11] and older generations, including academicians and credited artists, refused to abandon its practice as easily as the indoctrinated youth. Subject to torture and humiliation, these artist's works - which did not reflect the progressive politic - were exhibited as Black Paintings in official shows of degenerate art. Jiang Qing and other radicals chose to read 'political dissent and dissatisfaction' into these traditionalist pieces.[12] The painterly voice was either progressive or traditional, the two being officially disunited.

Huang Yongyu's *The Winking Owl*, c.1972 (fig. 4) became the flagship of the Black Painting denouncement. The work conforms to Xie He's 6th century *Six Principles of Chinese Painting*, deriving its ideology from the literati schools in an act divergent from the Cultural Revolution. 'Spirit Resonance' and 'Correspondence to the Object' are elements which drive the successes of the work, not Jiang Qing's Model Operas. Enduring 'months of criticism sessions at the Central Academy of Fine Art'[13], Huang was ostracised for his work which was read superficially as a political allegory. Contemporary criticism now understands the owl as an ill-omen in China, attaching pessimism to its character; it is also true that the owl symbol resonates with western ideas of wisdom[14] and is perceived as irreverent in its confrontation of the viewer. Eugene Y. Wang's study compounds these speculations: 'the overwhelming central frontality of the owl, which claims the viewer's attention, makes explicit the painting's impulse to communicate with the viewer.'[15] The owl, a voice of intellectualism, modestly comments on the 'complexities and absurdities of life.'[16] Extending Confucian sensibility, the artist consciously avoids the attack of Mao's doctrines. Indeed, his colophon to a 1978 version meditates: 'How many people's faces this bird has gazed upon!'[17] The threat of Black Painting, and by extension, the traditionalist voice simply lay in its detached observation of the contemporary.

[11] J. Tompkins & S. Valera, 'Art and China's Revolution', *Asia Society,* 2008. Available: <http://sites.asiasociety.org/chinarevo/>. [Accessed 1.3.13]
[12] Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China,* 160.
[13] *Ibid*., 161.
[14] *Ibid*., 161.
[15] E.Y. Wang, 'The Winking Owl: Visual Effect and Its Art Historical Thick Description', *Critical Inquiry,* 26.3 (2000), 440.
[16] Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China,* 162.
[17] *Ibid*.

Art of the Revolution had to promote the future, not examine the present. Whilst Mao instigated a rejection of tradition, this rejection is still reducible to an engagement. A stifled voice often garners the most attention; the artist's attenuation can then be received as valuable.

## WESTERN EXPOSURE (1979-1989)

'artists first, China second.'[18]

In 1976, after the arrest of the Gang of Four, artistic production was reduced to a state of confused ennui. It wasn't until the economic reforms of 1979, which opened the People's Republic up to a global sphere of political and cultural discourses, that art was re-engaged. For the first time since before the Civil War, exposure to western art practices was unfettered and without official stigmas. Responding to new freedoms, the decade that followed saw artistic experimentation accelerate, with multiple movements vying simultaneously and a tempestuous relationship between past and present kept the art world in flux. Elements of Futurism, Dada, Surrealism and Hyperrealism replaced the hybrid of officialdom, a grotesque of both Folk Art and Revolutionary Realism. Intellectualist society was openly in mourning for the tragedies and violence of the Cultural Revolution under Mao.

Dissidence had been all but suffocated and a new visual vocabulary was required to respond to national grievance. Scar Art was a carnal and pragmatic response to a developing disassociation with, or even denial of, immediate histories. Detached from the institutional mainstream, Scar Art refuted its own 'Chineseness' and consciously rejected Chinese painterly traditions – subject, technique, medium - ascribing them to an outmoded, shameful past. A prototype for the movement, Luo Zhongli's *Father,* 1980 (fig. 5) is a rejection of the artificialities of the Cultural Revolution. The deification of Mao is parodied through the stoic provincial labourer, a symbol of the true proletariat, elevated by monumental canvas size (227x154cm), quasi-spiritual title and graphic photorealism, in tribute to Chuck Close.[19] Luo attacks the personality cult and pseudo-religious ritual that surrounded Mao, reflecting on the exploitation of icons within policy.[20] The audacious portrayal of poverty unsettled officialdom. Allegedly, the Sichuan School of Fine Arts 'insisted on the inclusion of the ballpoint pen behind the figure's left ear'[21], symptomatic of an institutional micro-effort to

[18] X. Zhen, 'A Few Words...' in *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China,* curated by S. Groom, K. Smith and X. Zhen (Liverpool, 2007), 27.
[19] C. Clunas, *Art in China*, (Oxford, 1997), 217.
[20] Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China*, 145.
[21] Clunas, *Art in China*, 217.

industrialise the archaic. As evidence of residual tensions, stigmatising the traditional – here in subject, not application – the addition of the pen exhibits the chronic resonance of Cultural Revolution doctrines both in art and institution.

Filtering the sentimental and instinctive qualities of Scar Art, Stream of Life art formalised chaotic ideologies into two distinct principles. The movement was to reject mythologised heroes who fuelled the lie of the Revolution, and embrace the ordinary individual. A return to existentialist philosophy, Stream of Life art reintroduced landscape as a traditional means to 'achieve universal harmony with nature'[22]. A compound of classical ink painting and American Abstract Expressionism, paintings like Wu Guanzhong's *Pine Spirit*, 1984, embrace both antiquity and Taoist spirituality, somewhat diverging from Scar Art and its aggressive modernity. Wu applies familiar calligraphic techniques; the boneless method and a flying white, while an abstract narrative leads the eye, referent to the handscroll medium. The work aligns more closely with the Literati schools than Maoist academies. A marked difference to Scar Art, whereby Stream of Life art can be understood as the voice of traditional philosophy, adhering to the Confucian principle 'that a work of art should be "full of yearning, but not wound the heart."'[23]

Both modes were supplanted by the '85 Movement, a multi-disciplinary phenomenon which surrounded the 'most intense discussion of culture since the early twentieth century.'[24] An evocation of Surrealism, this incarnation relied on the appropriation of the institutionally taught Revolutionary Realism manner, translated in new metaphysical compositions and symbols. Compounding the self-reflective habit of Chinese art, artist Li Xianting proposes that 'the painting coming out of the contemporary Chinese art scene has developed from a "new tradition" of Chinese realism.'[25] Zhang Qun and Meng Luding's *In the New Era: Revelations of Adam and Eve*, 1985 (fig. 6) exhibits a corrosion of Chinese spirituality in the presence of Christian iconography, not unlike in Zhou's *Hunan Communist Group*. The whole work exudes a western infection: classically modelled nudes cite the Venus Pudica; the apple recalls Original Sin, and the aesthetics attest to a stylistic debt owed to André Breton et al. Nevertheless, the artists' voice is their own. At the foot of the image are the Dunhuang Caves, the source of Chinese cultural identity, an allegorical platform upon which the image is constructed. Here we might locate the artistic voice between celebration and shameful reverence.

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[22] Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China*, 201.
[23] L. Xianting, "Contemporary Chinese Art and a Declining Culture" in (eds) B. Fibicher & M. Frehner, *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection* (Ostfildern, 2005), 25.
[24] G. Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Massachusetts, 2011), 101.
[25] Xianting, 'Contemporary Chinese Art', 25.

The ’85 Movement inspired intellectual endeavour beyond the visual; in philosophy, history, culture and religion re-evaluation accorded with contemporary standards.[26] The artist’s voice seized influence previously unseen in the Republic. With the increasing exploitation of foreign trade as a vehicle for economic growth certain aspects of capitalist practice became essential to Chinese politics. Deng Xiaoping famously remarked ‘no matter if it is a white cat or a black cat; as long as it can catch mice, it is a good cat.’[27] A philosophy to transcend politics and art, China became secondary to the artist himself, and his vision for the canvas.

## TIANANMEN AND IDENTITY (1989-2000)

‘Metaphor, interpretation, and specious, deliberately misrepresentative judgements’[28]

All notions of contemporary Chinese art were revised in 1989. The events of this year; namely the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, and the Tiananmen Square protests, were catalytic in the further reformation of a Chinese voice. Curated by Gao Minglu, the *China/Avante-Garde* exhibition was the first and only appearance of an avant-garde collective at the National Gallery.[29] Indebted to an increasingly capitalist economy, the exhibition drew inevitable criticisms of catering to the bourgeoisie, a familiar Cultural Revolution adage. The reality was in sharp contradiction, the exhibition was ascribed the title of ‘Small Tian’anmen Square’[30] a reference in hindsight to the actively progressive ideologies that endured beyond its closure, later embodied by the Cynical Realism and Political Pop movements.

The Tiananmen Square protests, specifically the June Fourth Incident, were the ultimate reaction to the compounding of social tensions: financial inflation, waning career prospects, a plague of political corruption, and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. China’s values were scrutinised both domestically and internationally. Reassessing the value of communism, and with it ‘Chineseness’, questions were asked: what was the Chinese identity, did it matter, or even exist? Should it be embraced or rejected? Art in the next decade would attempt to define ‘Chineseness’ through its inextricable link with tradition and by extension, the complex past.

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[26] *Ibid*., 101.
[27] A Sichuan proverb
[28] Weiwei, ‘The Multiple Predicaments’, 14.
[29] Ma, M., ‘Memories of 1989’. Artzine China. Available: <http://www.artzinechina.com/display_vol_aid252_en.html> [Accessed 4.4.12]
[30] Minglu, *Total Modernity*, 154.

**Fig. 1.** Anonymous, *Follow Closely Chairman Mao's Great Strategic Plan*, 1968. Gouache. Reproduced from M. Galikowski, *Art and Politics in China: 1949-1984* (Hong Kong, 1998), fig. 14. [N.B. Every effort has been made to obtain permission to reproduce Figs. 1-7,]

**Fig. 2.** Zhou Shuqiao, *Hunan Communist Group,* c. 1970. Oil on canvas. Reproduced from Galikowski, fig. 13.

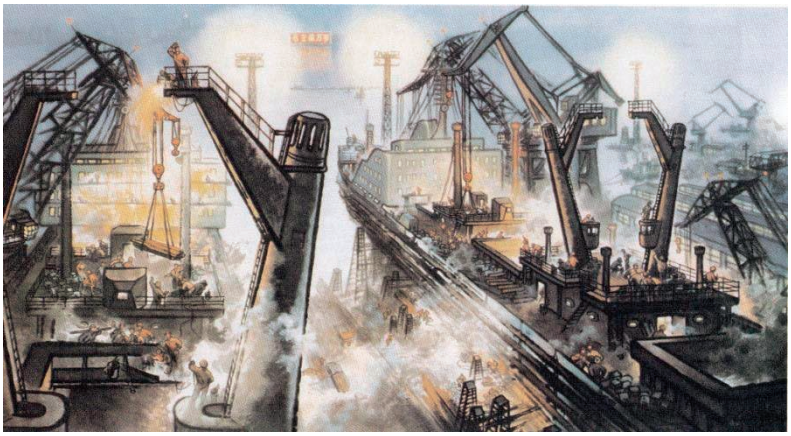

**Fig. 3.** Chen Shifa et al., *Fire Trees, Silver Flowers, the Sky Never Darkens* , c. 1972. Ink and Colour. Reproduced from Galikowski, fig. 28.

**Fig. 4.** Huang Yongyu, *Winking Owl,*1978, after original c.1972. Ink and Colour. Reproduced from Galikowski, fig. 23.

**Fig. 5.** Luo Zhongli, *Father*, 1980, Oil on canvas. 227x154cm, Chinese National Art Gallery, Beijing. Reproduced from Galikowski, fig. 31.

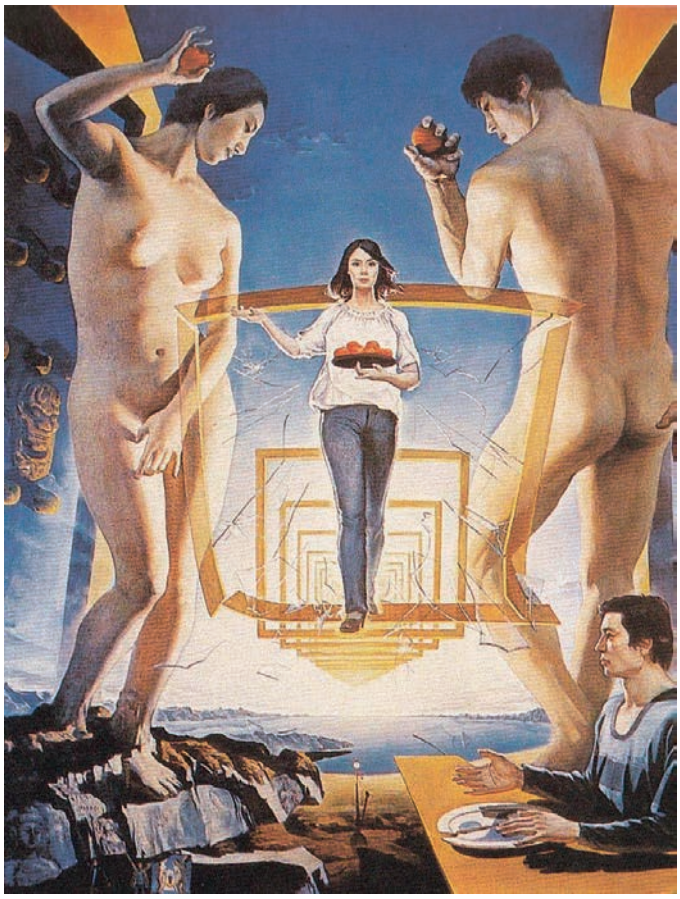

**Fig. 6.** Zhang Qun and Meng Luding, *In the New Era: Revelations of Adam and Eve*, 1985. Oil on canvas. Reproduced from Galikowski, fig.40

**Fig. 7.** Zhang Xiaogang, *A Big Family*, 1995. Oil on canvas. 179x229cm. Courtesy Saatchi Gallery, ©Zhang Xiaogang.


**Fig. 8.** Wang Guangyi, *Chanel No. 5*, 2001. Oil on canvas. 2 panels, 300x200cm each. Courtesy © Sigg Collection, Switzerland

**Fig. 9.** WOKmedia, *New Breed*, 2006. 69 partly broken upscale porcelain eggs, painted with ink and colour. ~35x28cm each. Courtesy of WOKmedia

**Fig. 10.** Xia Xiaowan, *Chinese ancient landscape of snowy mountain and hut*, 2008. Glass pencils, 14 tinted glass panes, 6mm each. 173x122x73cm. Goetz Collection, Munich; courtesy Galerie Urs Meile

**Fig. 11.** Liu Bolin, *Hiding in the City: No. 89 – Forbidden City,* 2010. Photographic print. Courtesy of Eli Klein Fine Art, © Liu Bolin.

**Fig. 12**: Ai Weiwei, *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads* (12 bronze sculptures, ~120cm each + column elevation, 2011). Creative Commons, Eric Huang.

Amongst the first to respond artistically to the violence of protest was Chen Danqing, formerly associated with provincial new realism. His diptychs and triptychs, painted between June 1989 and 1995, paired images of graphic violence from Tiananmen with the exploits of the western youth, salacious nightclub culture, and performance. Linked only by the act of pairing, the artist sacrifices his critical voice in order to disturb the viewer who must discern some connection. Examining the void between Chinese suffering and the depthless concerns of the West, the series can be understood as a solemn plea for global empathy.

Cynical Realism was the natural progression of the Chinese oil painting in the 1990s. Meditative and often ethereal subject matter rejected the violence of recent history. Artists like Zhang Xiaogang and his melancholy Happy Families, or Fang Lijun, whose popi-style series of bald heads understood insanity 'as a method of intellectual self-liberation,'[31]dominated portraiture and figurative painting.

Zhang Xiaogang's *A Big Family,* 1995 (fig. 7) unsettles the traditional family portrait. Citing the late commercial availability of photography, pulverised charcoal and watercolours are used 'borrowing the technique of applying wet paint in the delicate *gongbi* style of traditional ink painting, to produce smooth, intense coloration in a kitsch style.'[32] The title of the work, *A Big Family*, plays on multiple interpretations: an allusion to the breaking of the one-child policy (mother and two children), a manifestation of canvas size (which recalls murals of the 50s), or a perverted irony in the absence of a paternal figure. Cast in an enigmatic soft-focus, the image is centred upon the figure marked in red, a tacit reference to the Red Guard. Fragmentary line interrupts the image, reminiscent of aged film; the canvas becomes an ethereal document of some reality. The artist is again voiceless, the presenter of evidence, not the social commentator.

Conversely, Wang Guangyi's 'Great Castigation' series, from the early 1990s onwards, relies on a critical parody of Cultural Revolution propaganda to neuter the excesses of commercialisation and political hysteria. A crux of the Political Pop[33] movement, the artist fuses western branding with striking, gestural woodblock simplicity, set against a tireless red. *Chanel No.5,* 2001 (fig. 8) is a disfigurement of the familiar. The eponymous fragrance illustrates a terrible commoditisation of the modern global consciousness. Therein the presentation of four heroic youths clutching Mao's *Little Red Book*, identifies the political artefact as an equally impotent commodity. The artist deconstructs consumerism and

[31] Xianting, 'Contemporary Chinese Art', 26.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] C. Heinrich, 'Wang Guangyi' in (eds) B. Fibicher & M. Frehner, *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection*, (Ostfildern, 2005), 68.

communism through the pseudo-icon. Wang deliberately entangles the work in metaphor and imagery, a means of distancing and distracting, in the 1990s confrontation of realities is still indirect, complicit in documentation. The artist's voice observes social illnesses without posting treatment.

Increasingly, we witness a critical empowerment contingent on an engagement with tradition. The attenuated artist, so afflicted by the events at Tiananmen Square, must rearrange his aesthetic impulses, formulating a vocabulary which reacts specifically to affirm China's identity. The artist's voice will deliver this vocabulary, a composite of artistic systems embedded deeply within the nation's cultural conscience.

## 'CHINESENESS' NOW (2000-2013)

'A special Chinese quality will change with time'[34]

In the new millennium the definitive value of tradition remains unconsolidated. Prior to Uli Sigg's 2005 exhibition, *Mahjong*, the question was posed to featured artists '"Chineseness" – is there such a thing?' The responses collected show little boundary to the extremes of opinion on where Chineseness and symbiotically, tradition, lie in the production and consumption of art. Wang Guangyi places total value on understanding histories and tradition, musing 'artistic expression arises from the uniting of an artist with the macro-concept of a nation'[35], whilst the Luo Brothers disregard any function of artistic origins, resolving that 'contemporary Chinese art is a clone of Western art. Only in being painted by a Chinese artist does it have a Chinese quality!'[36]

Disassembling Chineseness as a physical quality, installation art collective WOKmedia (Julie Mathias and Wolfgang Kaeppner) work via the appropriation of a faux-traditional Chinese identity. Their practice asks who can create art which is Chinese, examining China as a facet of a wider global realm, beyond even a migrant or diaspora population. Abstracting the definition of nationality, WOKmedia are critically at odds with artists like Xu Zhen who argues '"China" should not be just a term.'[37] In collaboration with the Contrasts Gallery of Shanghai, *Made in China* (wooden furniture, white lacquer, 2006) is a furniture ensemble embedded with disfigured wooden toys. Emerging from 'childhood memories' the toys are

[34] U. Sigg *et al*., '"Chineseness" – Is There Such a Thing?' in (eds) B. Fibicher & M. Frehner, *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection* (Ostfildern, 2005), 52.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] *Ibid*., 51.
[37] Zhen, 'A Few Words...', 25.

allegedly 'invading antique Chinese furniture [and] starting to threaten their traditional past.'[38] A western interpretation of contemporary factory culture, tradition is understood, perhaps wrongly, as an archaic commodity (a bench or a table), and not as an evolving ideological design.

WOKmedia's *New Breed,* 2006 (fig. 9) 'consists of 69 partly broken upscale porcelain eggs [...] suspended from the ceiling and strewn on the ground.'[39] Symptomatic of Western beliefs that tradition is a style, not a continuum, inside each egg is a traditional ink painting. The installation claims that the breaking eggs are the artistic liberation of a once entombed Chinese manner. The work does, however, successfully understand China's relationship with tradition as that of suppression and release. Although produced in China, it is difficult to attain sense of the political complexities that are subtly evident in works of greater authenticity. Artist and dissident Ai Weiwei presents such issues in his essay 'The Multiple Predicaments and Upturns of Chinese Contemporary Art', asserting 'without a firm grasp of China's history, its current unique predicament and relationship with the West, it is difficult to gain any profound understanding of contemporary Chinese culture.'[40]

'The assets that have accumulated during the long history of continuous development are unique.'[41] Reading tradition as fluid and 'continuous', Xia Xiaowan's spatial paintings are evidence of art that is both reflective and progressive. *Chinese ancient landscape of snowy mountain and hut,* 2008 (fig. 10) is 'an experiment in which several principle concepts in realistic painting have been transformed in both form and function.'[42] Xia's sculpture layers panes of glass creating a dynamic 'traditional' image that 'requires efforts in the fields of art and science as well.'[43] Influenced by calligraphic principles – indication of form through minimal line and a striking adoption of white space – the work is a synthesis of technological craft and ancient aesthetic values, Confucian in thought and antique-modern in form.

Informing photography as a medium, Liu Bolin examines Chineseness and the role of tradition through a conceptual framework. The 'Hiding in the City' series involves self-portraiture in which the background of the shot is painted precisely onto the artist who becomes an invisible subject. In *No. 89 - Forbidden City*, 2010 (fig. 11) Liu is consumed by the imperial architecture behind him, itself a symbol of historical censorship; appropriately

[38] WOKmedia, *Made in China*, May 23, 2007, Available: <http://www.wokmedia.com/?p=10> [Accessed 1.3.13]
[39] W. Shaoqiang, *et al*., *Installation Art* (Berkeley, 2011), 22.
[40] Weiwei, 'The Multiple Predicaments', 14.
[41] U. Sigg & M. Frehner, 'Access to China' in (eds) B. Fibicher & M. Frehner *Mahjong: Contemporary Chinese Art from the Sigg Collection* (Ostfildern, 2005), 20.
[42] Xia Xiaowan, *On Creating Glass Painting*, (Beijing, 2006), 1.
[43] *Ibid*.

coinciding with Google's 2010 decision to stop self-censoring. Indications of identity are suggested only by the play of light and shadow. The series investigates the voice in China, particularly amongst a swelling population; an increasingly popular theme, tackled by Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds,* 2010, amongst others. The work stands in the socio-political tradition of art as remedy, the artist seeks 'a spiritual redress in their defiance of authority.'[44] Born of personal experience, the forcible destruction of his Beijing studio in 2005, the series serves to silently protest, much like the stoicism conveyed in Luo Zhongli's *Father.*

Most recently officials have demanded the removal of live surveillance feeds, which had enabled the constant procurement of his whereabouts by his supporters.[45] Ai's *Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads,* 2011 (fig. 12) is a recreation of the 12 heads constructed for Emperor Qianlong by European Jesuits in the 18th century, which in 1860, during the second Opium War, were lost when the palace was looted. A conscious irony of design exists in their contemporary placement at Somerset House – former home to the Royal Academy - wherein the originals, modelled in a strictly European style have been *sinicized*[46] by history. Even without physical alteration, the installation is still presented as almost macabre and spiritually foreign; a conjecture based purely on an ideological reversal, proving that the modern *Chinese* voice is a psychological value above all else.

Applied to both art and politics, the Chinese cultural identity can now perhaps be best described through collector Uli Sigg's own analysis:

> [I]f there's one constant that one could call specifically Chinese, it is probably this capacity for taking on board the most attractive elements of other cultures and transforming them in such a way that they are absorbed, improved, bent into shape [...] Chineseness" is therefore not a certain paper, a particular style, drawing a line, or painting a landscape, but this characteristic of absorption and assimilation.'[47]

In the twenty-first century, the Chinese artist's voice is empowered not by a specific medium or methodology, but in its ability to absorb and assimilate. Understood as a continuum, the tradition impulse transforms constantly in what it reflects, yet it never ceases to rely on a conditioning from new and ancient histories.

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[44] A. Celii, "Hiding in the City with Liu Bolin", *TIME*, March 20, 2012. Available: <http://lightbox.time.com/2012/03/20/liu-bolin/> [Accessed 1.3.13]
[45] T. Branigan, 'Ai Weiwei ordered to switch off studio webcams', *The Guardian*, April 5, 2012. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/2012/apr/05/ai-weiwei-switches-off-studio-webcams> [Accessed 1.3.13]
[46] 'Sinicize' (verb): to make Chinese in character or bring under Chinese influence.
[47] Sigg, 'Access to China', 20.

Given China's complex discourse with its own historical making, we can understand the artist's voice to be symptomatic of an infinite dialogue with conceptions of tradition, and therefore the notion of 'Chineseness' itself. Tradition can be described through physicality or through philosophy: a particular brushstroke or a Confucian principle. Where unification is sought however, we will observe an ever present aesthetic of reaction, one which pervades our optical experience and perhaps always will. While the artist's voice may be conditioned by authorities, ideological or institutional, it can never be divested from the discourses from which it was conceived. Therein lays the eternal impetus of the creator, bound forever to the discussion of China itself.

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# *Vox et Potestas*: personal communication through the built environment of Rome in the time of Augustus

Mark McCahill

Through the efforts and contributions of Marcus Agrippa, Tiberius Nero, and the extended noble coterie of Augustus, individualized, controlled contributions to the cityscape of Rome are presented as a legacy of the one and the many. While the monuments, architecture and infrastructure of Augustan Rome express the voice and power of the Roman aristocracy afforded the opportunity to participate, they also express the ideology of the city's greatest patron, Augustus. Each contribution to the civic environment can be understood as an expressive and individual voice from the period, but with the power and glory of Rome residing, ultimately, in the imperial person of Augustus. It is, therefore, Augustus' *vox et potestas*[1] we are meant to appreciate.

## INTRODUCTION

> But I observed that you cared not only about the common life of all men, and the constitution of the state, but also about the provision of suitable public buildings; so that the state was not only made greater through you by its new provinces, but the majesty of the empire also was expressed through the eminent dignity of its public buildings. [… ] Furthermore, with respect to the future, you have such regard to public and private buildings, that they will correspond to the grandeur of our history, and will be a memorial to future ages.

Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, I.2 & 3[2]

When Vitruvius stated 'the majesty of the empire also was expressed through the eminent dignity of its public buildings', we can accept that this was not mere platitude; rather, the glory and power of Rome was understood to radiate out from its built environment. On this basis, the extent of building work and regeneration undertaken in the time of Augustus is key to appreciating three crucial aspects of the voice and power dynamic: control through legacy, in terms of duration and in the extent of the plan executed by those empowered, or exhorted, to participate; the imprint of personal 'voice' upon the Roman cityscape, and the freedom of expression (however notional) derived from status and proximity to Augustus as *princeps*[3]. Additionally, the significance of ideas and ideology, as much as visual markers, underpinning

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[1] 'voice and power'; NB: this translation is the author's, as are all subsequent translations
[2] Vitruvius, *De Architectura (On Architecture), I.2 & 3*, trans. F. Granger (London, 1931), 3 & 5.
[3] 'ruler', or 'first man'

the Augustan approach to renewal of Rome's built environment demonstrates for us how universal the approach to urban regeneration was for the period, and how expressive and communicative its legacy is perceived to be.

The overlap of the later Republican and earlier Augustan period attests to the complexity of Rome's urban voice, with competing personalities and structures that confused any message; Augustus' efforts redefined what the (or, rather, his) civic message was, asserted through uniformity and ideology. That this approach extended across personal, architectural and infrastructural monumentality is pivotal to understanding the all-encompassing nature of Augustan renewal. Equally, due to the increasing control of Augustus over the term of his rule, the diminishing opportunity available for individuals to participate in monumental expression, *ex familia*[4], was demonstrated through the personalities who took the opportunity to engage. Individual expressions through named monuments became less and less common, replaced by a more anonymous, infrastructural contribution.

## MARCUS AGRIPPA

> Every task assigned by the Emperor demands an earnest sense of responsibility, and whether by a watchful concern which is mine by nature or by loyalty which is sincere and attentive, I am roused not merely to the competent performance of an entrusted task, but even to feel devotion towards it.

Sextus Iulius Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae*, I[5]

What relevance does the statement of an imperial bureaucrat, more than one hundred years after the death of Agrippa, have to Agrippa? It is neither disingenuous to say that the answer lies in the sentiment of the statement, rather than its date or author, nor incongruous to include such sentiment, when we evaluate both the level of civic involvement and the reasonable possibility that Agrippa may have uttered (or, at least, considered) the same words and expression of devotion to duty. If we examine the impact of power relationships with others, to aspects of control thereof – specific to the built environment of Rome – and to later incidents of restriction or repression of monumental voice, emphasis can be shifted from mere devotion to duty, to focus upon well-established, commonly-acknowledged friendship and kinship: that of Augustus'[6] most trusted confidante, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa[7].

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[4] 'outside the family'

[5] Sextus Iulius Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae (On the Water Management of the City of Rome*), I, trans. R. H. Rodgers (Vermont, 2003), taken from <http://www.uvm.edu/~rrodgers/Frontinus.html> [Accessed 22.9.12]

[6] For the sake of ease, the name 'Augustus' will be used throughout, despite the granting of same not having been made by the Roman Senate until 27 B.C; this helps avoid crossover in names, from

That there was an inter-changeability of control, influence and voice between Augustus and Agrippa is often overlooked, yet, seems evident through a particular example: Agrippa's long-term responsibility for essential public works, for example, *aquaeductus*; *cloacae*; *thermae*, and *horreae*[8], but with credit for completion, delivery, availability of service, and of the overall benefits of the differing projects assumed by Augustus. While historiographical credit tends to be attributed to Agrippa[9], a question remains: why would a military man of such distinction – a man credited with key, strategic involvement and success at Actium that helped decide the war between Augustus and Antony[10] – and the most senior, trusted figure in Augustus' retinue, consider (let alone accept) 'demotion' from *consul* to *aedile*[11], when the normal next-step was *pro-consul*? [12] Was it merely to facilitate the undertaking and completion of certain essential public works perceived as lowly – aqueduct repairs; sewer cleaning – on Augustus' behalf, or did a higher, more considered, selfless purpose exist?

Agrippa's reduced office, whether it was officially sanctioned or self-sought, may have been borne of necessity. It is arguable that the senior office of consul could not be demeaned through involvement in, for example, the necessities of public utilities overhaul (this, despite the fact that Augustus himself had been Commissioner of Roads[13]); the office of *aedile* would have represented a closer correlation to the previously responsible office within the Republic of *censor* or *praetor urbanus* [14]. This is also reflected in the actions of Agrippa's contemporary, Messalla, who accepted the responsibilities of *curator aquarum* [15] after Agrippa's death[16], having also previously been *consul*[17]. Augustus' adroit use and placement of senior, trusted people – starting with Agrippa – meant that positions perceived to be of

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Octavian, to Caesar, to Augustus and any ensuing confusion over the time period 44 B.C to A.D 14.
[7] I.M. Barton, 'Religious Buildings', in (ed.) I.M. Barton, *Roman Public Buildings* (Exeter, 2008), 47.
[8] 'aqueducts; drains; baths, and warehouses'
[9] The emphasis of this 'historical' credit concerns innumerable references to Agrippa and his civic projects by various ancient authors: Frontinus (*De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae*), Dio Cassius (*Historia Romana*), and Suetonius (*De Vita Caesarum*), with more recent historiography from archaeological notables, such as Lanciani (*The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*), Shipley (*Agrippa's building activities in Rome*), Zanker (*The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*), and Favro (*The Urban Image of Rome*).
[10] Tacitus, *Annales (The Annals of Imperial Rome)*, trans. Michael Grant, (London, 1996), 32.
[11] P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. A. Shapiro, (Ann Arbor, 1990), 71.
[12] The offices mentioned translate thus: *consul* = chief magistrate; *aedile* = city buildings superintendent; *pro consul* = provincial governor
[13] Dio Cassius, *Urbs Romae (The City of Rome)*, 54.8.4, trans. Dudley, from *Rome: The Augustan Age, A Source Book*, Chisholm and Ferguson (Eds.), (Oxford, 1981), 143.
[14] Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae, VII*, trans. R. H. Rodgers (Vermont, 2003), taken from <http://www.uvm.edu/~rrodgers/Frontinus.html 22/09/2012> [Accessed 22.9.12]. NB: the offices mentioned translate thus:
*censor* = morality and infrastructure magistrate; *praetor urbanus* = a judge in matters concerning citizens of the city of Rome
[15] 'water commissioner'
[16] Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae, XCIX*, trans. R. H. Rodgers, taken from <http://www.uvm.edu/~rrodgers/Frontinus.html>
[17] R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy*, (Oxford, 1986), 200.

lower status could be carried out by the Roman *nobilitas*[18], without any corresponding lowering of their status, any offence to aristocratic sensibilities, or diminution of public, participatory 'voice'. From this we derive the importance of status, of controlling elements thereof, and of the opportunity then afforded to communicate and participate in a public capacity. That the occasion then existed for individualised messages to be advertised may also be discerned. Agrippa's endeavours and ministrations in aid of public works could be construed negatively; a duty of such magnitude and scope might reasonably be expected to distract the person responsible from other concerns – exploitation of personal popularity, or consideration of political and military strength – and with control by Augustus still prevalent. Conversely, the prestige and recognition inherent in planning and executing such a grand plan of essential public rejuvenation, with or without the insistence of the *imperator*[19], is self-evident.

At this point, we should recognize the scope of what the duumvirate of Augustus and Agrippa was trying to accomplish: Roman renewal, root and branch, from the subterranean level upward; a project instigated and supported by Caesar[20], as *princeps*; and a project executed and communicated by a key, trusted ally as *de-facto* deputy. Personal statements and agendas evident from earlier Republican years of recent memory were not immediately apparent, evidenced in Eck's observations regarding Agrippa's refusal of triumphs[21], and corroborated by Shipley's work on the extent to which the *viri triumphales* had previously imprinted themselves on the civic built environment[22]. Reticence on the part of Agrippa, however, over control and exploitation of public space appears to be absent; a troubling observation worth investigation, if we interpret his use of the built environment as celebration of 'triumph' by another name. What real difference exists between the *Theatrum Pompeii Magni* and Agrippa's many named uses of space, such as *Campus Agrippae*; *Thermae Agrippae*; *Pons Agrippae*[23] (to name but three projects), other than the former is solitary, triumphal, polyvalent (this is disputable[24]) and monumental, not numerous, personal, singular and (mostly) spatial?

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[18] 'the nobility'
[19] 'emperor'
[20] 'Caesar' is used here in the titular sense, not as a deviation from the naming convention previously noted.
[21] W. Eck, 'Emperor and senatorial aristocracy in competition', *Yale Classical Studies, Vol. XXXV*, *The Emperor and Rome*, (eds.) B.C. Ewald & C.F. Norena, (Cambridge, 2011), 92.
[22] F.W. Shipley, 'Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome from the Death of Caesar to the Death of Augustus', *Memoirs of the Academy in Rome*, Vol. 9 (1931), 9-10; NB: the designation mentioned translates 'triumphant men', and is specifically military
[23] The spaces mentioned translate thus: theatre of Pompey the Great; field (or park) of Agrippa; baths of Agrippa; bridge of Agrippa
[24] It is arguable that Pompey contrived the polyvalence of the structure by use of the portico attached to his theatre, dedicated to *Venus Vitrix* ('Venus the Conqueror'), in order for its construction and permanence to be approved. See A.J. Ruthers, 'Buildings For Entertainment' in (ed.) I.M. Barton,

The significance of Agrippa to Rome's spaces is reflected in his role as the first, although not officially titled, *curator aquarum*; Messalla being the first to receive the formal title[25]. The importance of administrative public office, and of its place in the history of Agrippa's relationship with Augustus, is illustrated by two things: the extent to which Agrippa was allowed to reflect personal and considerable environmental control, as he stamped his identity on the civic renewal of Rome, and involvement in the many public offices created in the time of Augustus[26]. The scope of Agrippa's involvement in improving Rome was not just restricted to beautifying or enhancing spaces within it, nor to actions within his lifetime; Dio Cassius states that Agrippa, in his will as administered by Augustus, also provided for the needs of the *populi Romani*[27]. While this observation is itself unconnected to the built environment of Rome, what it does highlight is the pervasiveness of Agrippa's connection to, and with, Rome, from which is derived the importance of his, thereby, Augustus', investment in Rome at all levels: economically; environmentally; infrastructurally, and therefore personally. It is also redolent of the kind of tribunician power exercised by others (with varying degrees of success) in previous years of the Republic: Mark Antony, of recent memory, and the Gracchi, are prime examples. Telling, when we consider the number of occasions Agrippa was appointed tribune with Augustus[28]. This raises a compelling conundrum: exactly what kind of personal benefits were derived from expending your own funds alongside state funds, to improve different aspects of Rome's built environment, when the honour for its delivery was credited to Augustus? In this we should recognize signs of associative honour, and of a greater good over personal gain, rather than an overt, propagandist agenda. This theme is significant and of equal relevance when the projects of Augustus' family and friends are considered, as they span the late Republic and early Principate.

What is pertinent to the relationship between Augustus and Agrippa, and which has not been mentioned thus far, is that the bestowal of 'imperial'[29] patronage represented, however tacit, an aspect of control that also provided an opportunity to 'speak' commandingly. With

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*Roman Public Buildings*, (Exeter, 2008), 101.

[25] Frontinus, *De Aquaeductu Urbis Romae*, taken from <http://www.uvm.edu/~rrodgers/Frontinus.html>

[26] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum (The Twelve Caesars): Augustus, XXXVII*, trans. Robert Graves, revised with an introduction by Michael Grant, (London, 2003), 67.

[27] Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana (Roman History), LIV.29.3-5*, taken from M. Reinhold, *The Golden Age of Augustus* (Campbellville, 1978), 115; NB: the designation mentioned is translated 'Roman people'

[28] 'Fasti, 18-13 B.C.', in *Rome: The Augustan Age, A Source Book*, Chisholm and Ferguson (Eds.), 13 14

[29] The designation 'imperial' is used advisedly, in that it is rather disingenuous; the evidence for awareness of any 'imperial' agenda or ambitions is inconclusive, whereas efforts to restore the values (and the continuation) of the Republic were, essentially, being undertaken by Augustus and Agrippa. See Syme (51), as mentioned later in this paper, and Farrell (54) concerning a proto-imperial analysis.

Agrippa's *homo novus* status[30], despite his great military achievements and rigorous personal application to duty – cleaning out drains and repairing leaking pipes, while magnanimous, part of a grand plan, and for the greater good of all Roman citizens, is not exactly captivating – the importance of Augustus served other vital purposes for him: personal security; advancement, and, perhaps most significantly, *auctoritas*[31]. The programme of environmental renewal undertaken by Agrippa could be nothing other than the exercise of the personal authority of Augustus; from this, *auctoritas* also translates as the statement of intent already mentioned. In this sense, another critical message could be conveyed: *mores*[32].

The importance of moral rectitude to the entire programme of renewal underpins the intricacies of Agrippa's relationship with Augustus. The synchronous nature of *auctoritas* and *mores* permeates the overall sense of social, architectural and infrastructural regeneration undertaken throughout the time period mentioned, and is understood through moral legislation, temple rebuilding, and public utilities overhaul respectively, with Agrippa at the helm of implementation until his death. The moral imperative attached to Augustus' agenda, inclusive of the built environment, should not be understated; moral legislation (*Lex Iulia* – marriage, and *Lex Papia-Poppaea* – marriage and children[33]), despite Farrell's reservations on Augustus' hypocrisy[34], was as much a foundational element of Augustus' reign as the built environment. Agrippa's proximity to Augustus – first as trusted ally, then as his son-in-law and aide-de-camp – should be recognized for the bolster it clearly was: they spoke with one voice. Additionally, to consider Agrippa himself as foundational would be no exaggeration; the impression of unstinting support provided to Augustus by him serves as a convenient metaphor for the foundational regeneration previously discussed, present through the entirety of their relationship, and which directly influenced the built environment of Rome.

A critical consequence of the duumvirate, however base its overtones, was the controlling influence of money; Horace was rather scathing in his assessment of this aspect of Rome's enrichment[35]. The level of enrichment Agrippa achieved throughout his career, particularly

[30] Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy*, 44; NB: the status mentioned is translated 'new man'
[31] J. Farrell, 'The Augustan Period: 40 BC – AD 14', in *A Companion to Latin Literature*, Stephen Harrison (Ed.), (Oxford, 2007), 48 (this refers also to *Res Gestae*, 34; NB: the designation mentioned is translated 'authority'
[32] 'morals'
[33] R.I. Frank, 'Augustus' Legislation on Marriage and Children', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity,* Vol. 8 (1975), 43-44; NB: the laws stated are translated 'Julian Law' (introduced/enacted by the Julian *gens*, or family) and 'Papian-Poppaean Law' (introduced/enacted by the *consuls* M. Papius Mutilis and Q. Poppaeus Secundus) subsequent to the *Lex Iulia*
[34] Farrell, 'The Augustan Period: 40 BC – AD 14', 53.
[35] Horace, *Odes, II.15*, trans. J. Michie (Penguin 1967, repr. 1978), in *Rome: The Augustan Age, A Source Book*, Chisholm and Ferguson (eds), 261.

*manubiae*[36] gained from his military service on behalf of the state and Augustus, served two crucial purposes: it financed the extent and scale of the public works he undertook, with its concomitant benefits, essentially at the behest of Augustus; it provided a comfortable lifestyle replete with recognition, communicated through named public spaces and facilities in Rome, and facilitated philanthropy (see earlier reference to Dio Cassius, n.17). This can be recognized as a mechanism of control, however passive, that enabled Augustus to retain the loyalty of a subordinate, as Augustus mentioned many times within the *Res Gestae* the figures involved in supporting and beautifying both Rome and the empire[37]. While it is unclear whether the requirement for control with Agrippa existed or not, given his refusal of well-deserved triumphs [38], other glories existed in perpetuity through the same kind of monumentality that *viri triumphales* had previously enjoyed and exploited. Equally, it seems both perverse and ironic that Agrippa could no sooner celebrate a triumph than Augustus, with full awareness of his own unique status, initially post-Actium (31 B.C.), then, post-Senate decree of the title Augustus (27 B.C., see *Res Gestae* 34), could admit that his general achieved most (if not all) of his major military victories. In the new regime, Augustus, as *imperator*, had to also be *vir supremus triumphalis*[39]. The commitment, purpose, resolve and expenditure of Agrippa provide a compelling testimony to the effectiveness of personal and close control, understood within the mechanism of Augustus' overall control, and with the concomitant benefits expected from such: *vox et potestas*.

If a final, representative example from the built environment of Rome of the acute nature of personal expression and control were to be offered, contributed, specifically, by Agrippa, it would be the Pantheon[40]. Setting aside the modern popular impression of a coffered concrete vault atop a vast rotunda, with sumptuous interior decoration (which is the reconstructed Pantheon of Hadrian), the significance of the space Agrippa dedicated to the gods – with whom he intended to place the person of Augustus[41] – cannot be forgotten. A hall of gods, Iulius Caesar included, synthesized the new message of Rome, with obvious integration of the *gens Iulia*[42], of which Agrippa would become a part, by marriage and progeny, into the mythology of Rome itself. Complementarity seems evident in the similar message expressed by Augustus within the *Forum Augusti*[43], with *summi viri*[44] and an aetiological sculptural

[36] F.W. Shipley, *Agrippa's Building Activities in Rome*, (St. Louis, 1933), 12; NB: the term is translated 'war booty'
[37] Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 15, 16, 21, in *Rome: The Augustan Age, A Source Book*, Chisholm and Ferguson (eds.), 7-8; NB: the term is translated 'achievements'
[38] Shipley, *Agrippa's Building Activities in Rome*, 11-12.
[39] 'the highest man of triumph'
[40] Shipley, *Agrippa's Building Activities in Rome*, 57.
[41] R. Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*, (London, 1897), 476-477.
[42] 'Julian family'
[43] 'Forum of Augustus'

programme. While a visual example would be beneficial for supporting this point, there is no agreement on what Agrippa's Pantheon actually looked like[45]. Lanciani profers a very plausible descriptive image that is qualified by his archaeological rigour: expensive materials used (travertine, marble) within its floor plan were found to reside at a considerable depth below the extant ruins[46]. Sadly, we must satisfy ourselves with its acknowledged existence and intent, if not its true image.

## TIBERIUS NERO

The often-strained relationship between Augustus and his adopted son, Tiberius, aptly conveys, through restricted or muted voice, a theme of control, whereby, Augustus managed (or did not, depending on your point of view) both the line of succession, and the timing of naming his successor. Despite Tiberius' visibility and early involvement in the plans of Augustus[47], the security of his accession did not appear to be guaranteed. As Tacitus points out (rather acidly)[48], it was obvious that all of Augustus' other blood-relative options had been exhausted: Marcellus, Augustus' nephew and son-in-law, adopted, and married to Augustus' daughter, Iulia, died 23 B.C.; Lucius and Gaius, his grandsons (from the marriage of his daughter, Iulia, to Agrippa after Marcellus' death), who died A.D. 2 and A.D. 4 respectively, and Agrippa Postumus, another grandson who, according to Suetonius, was an 'adopted' successor[49], but was eventually exiled A.D. 7. While Tiberius was noted as having been confirmed after Gaius' death in A.D. 4[50], the delay in, or absence of, unequivocal confirmation of his succession by Augustus up to this point, as Farrell contends[51], until the exhaustion of other family options – even after Augustus, effectively, prostituted his daughter, Iulia, to Tiberius as yet another dynastic suitor – can only have been a serious source of rancour on the part of Tiberius. His self-imposed exile in Rhodes attests, at least partly, to this schism with Augustus[52]. The ignominious setting aside of his wife, Vipsania (Agrippa's daughter), at Augustus' insistence[53] to secure the dynastic claim, would only have added to the problematic dynamic between them. What does this have to do with the built environment of Rome? From the historian's point of view, the absence of evidence can often say as much as its presence, and it is on this point that the interconnection of Augustus,

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[44] 'the greatest men'
[45] Shipley, *Agrippa's Building Activities in Rome*, 56ff.
[46] Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*, 476-477.
[47] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Tiberius, VI*, 112.
[48] Tacitus, *Annales: From Augustus to Tiberius*, 33.
[49] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Tiberius, XV*, 118.
[50] *Ibid*.
[51] Farrell, 'The Augustan Period: 40 B.C – A.D 14', 53.
[52] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Tiberius, X*, 114.
[53] *Ibid*. *VII*, 112.

Tiberius and the built environment can be illustrated; not through their fractious relationship, but through the paucity of proper 'visual' (read monumental) involvement in Rome. Absence of appropriate reverence for Augustus by Tiberius can be inferred, as can damning with faint, or muted, praise.

Using the observations and archaeological evidence of Lanciani[54], Shipley[55] and Favro[56], there are two attested, substantial monumental contributions from Tiberius throughout the entire period of Augustus' Principate: the *Templum Castoris et Pollucis*[57], which is dependent upon accepting Shipley's assertion that 7 B.C. is when Tiberius 'decreed' he would accept responsibility for it, rather than its dedication (A.D. 6, see Shipley, 55), and, of a more ironic nature, the *Templum Concordiae* (A.D. 10[58]). The former temple rebuilding, or acceptance of responsibility to rebuild, rather than dedication upon completion, coincides with the period just prior to Tiberius' self-imposed exile – this despite celebration of triumph in 7 B.C.[59] – while the latter represents, despite its irony, the sea-change in the later years of Augustus' reign. Tiberius was properly recognized as *filius Augustae*[60]; the duopoly of power between Augustus and Tiberius was formalized, akin to the earlier relationship of Augustus and Agrippa, and the significance of ratified succession was advertised to all. Each monument attested to the dichotomy of separate-but-similar messages: the reconstruction of the *Templum Castoris et Pollucis* demonstrated Tiberius' initial place in the Augustan family monopoly of Rome's built environment; that it was well-established, controlled and reserved. His dedication of the *Templum Concordiae* not only resolved the issues of succession, but dispelled (in theory, at least) the rancorous atmosphere that had existed between Augustus and Tiberius. A long wait for triumphal honours to materialize, we might suggest, but delivered none-the-less. Recognition of Augustus' advanced age and his failing health[61], whether tacit or acknowledged, allied to formal, joint sharing of *imperium*[62], provided a reversal in the one-way mechanism of control enjoyed by Augustus to that point; an irony unlikely to have gone unnoticed, particularly by Tiberius.

[54] Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*, 238, 272 & 288.
[55] Shipley, 'Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome from the Death of Caesar to the Death of Augustus', 53 & 56.
[56] D. Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*, (New York, 2007), 132-133.
[57] 'Temple of Castor and Pollux'
[58] Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*, 597 & Shipley, 'Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome from the Death of Caesar to the Death of Augustus', 56; NB: the building is translated 'Temple of Concord'
[59] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Tiberius, IX*, 114.
[60] 'son of Augustus'
[61] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Tiberius, IX*, 114.
[62] 'power of command'

AUGUSTUS' FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Prior to family monopoly of the built environment of Rome, others were involved in making their mark upon the environs of the city, the extended network of Augustus' family and friends among them. Syme lays out these multi-faceted relationships, and comments extensively on the 'aristocratic' network of this period[63]. One of the earliest examples of this is the *Templum Saturni* reconstruction by Lucius Munatius Plancus in 43 B.C., as attributed by Lanciani[64]. There is, however, a problem: Shipley refutes Plancus' closeness to Augustus, in that he was a recognized associate of Antony, therefore, not well-disposed to Augustus, and that the date was 42 B.C. (43 B.C. being the date of his triumph)[65]. Additionally, that there was later reconciliation suggests, perhaps, that acknowledgement of Plancus' place in the coterie of Augustus (at least, those involved in building projects) is, however retrospective, deserved. It certainly worked for Messalla[66], another associate of Antony. Association with Antony, as *Dux Orientalis*[67], may not, necessarily, have precluded adherence to the control or dictats of the *Dux Italiae*, or, as may be better acknowledged, *Dux Occidentalis*[68]: the future Augustus. Cornelius Balbus is another example, with the *Theatrum et crypta Balbi* from 13 B.C.[69], but, as Suetonius states, as a prominent Roman who was also closely associated with Augustus, through connection to Iulius Caesar[70], his 'late' contribution to the fabric of Rome, through his populist theatre and the personal space of his own crypt, is unique for the period. No other prominent Roman was able to build any such structure, as efforts were 'guided' by Augustus away from an earlier prompt regarding embellishment and restoration, toward upkeep of the roads network[71]. Maecenas, as Augustus' conduit for patronage of the arts, is another exemplar of constructor-by-proxy, with the *Horti Maeceanatis*[72]; landscaped during the 30s B.C., using 6-8 metres of soil over the top of a public dump and paupers' gravesite[73]. A named space or structure did not preclude the options of associative honour, nor appropriated glory through appropriated space. We might

[63] Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy*, 51-52.
[64] Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*, 293, NB; the building is translated 'Temple of Saturn'
[65] Shipley, 'Chronology of the Building Operations in Rome from the Death of Caesar to the Death of Augustus', 11.
[66] *Ibid*., 35.
[67] 'Eastern Leader'
[68] The titles are translated thus: 'Italian Leader', and 'Western Leader'
[69] Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*, 118 & 122; NB: the buildings are translated 'Theatre and crypt of Balbus'
[70] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Augustus, IV*, 46.
[71] *Ibid*., *XXX*, 62, & R. Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy: Mobility and Cultural Change* (London, 1999), 42.
[72] 'gardens of Maecenas'
[73] A. Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (Oxford, 2010), 330.

offer that Maecenas, as *patronus artis*[74], and through his gardens, represented the other side of the coin to Agrippa: an intellectual, ethereal, moral contributor to the fabric and voice of Rome, versus the visceral, physical, interactive efforts of Agrippa; equality of power, yet, difference of approach.

Augustus' immediate family – more appropriately, their memory – also benefited from this largesse; his nephew and son-in-law, Marcellus, had the *Theatrum Marcelli*[75] built (or, as Claridge contends, completed by Augustus from an unfinished project of Iulius Caesar[76]) and named, posthumously, in his honour. Appropriate space planning does not appear to have been a major consideration, as the juxtaposition of secular and religious appears haphazard. It is, therefore, difficult to conceive of deliberate propaganda, however, the proximity of other major sites of religious significance, such as *Templum Bellonae*?; *Aedis Iovis*; *Aedis Iunonis*; *Aedis Herculis Musarum*[77], alludes to certain possibilities: simply, a lack of care in placement, or a design borne out by Augustus' (or popular) love for Marcellus that, perhaps, was better reflected in a secular way, but with proximity to religious spaces meant to convey a higher purpose and message. That this also contained an experiential dimension for the *populi Romani* should not be forgotten. Equally, Claridge's earlier mention of the theatre as an inherited project from the time of Iulius Caesar (in competition to Pompey?) could answer for its placement and encroachment.

Following on from commemoration of Marcellus, the loss of Augustus' next adopted successors, his grandsons, Lucius and Gaius, resulted in further explicit visual imagery, as Suetonius states:

> Some of Augustus' public works were undertaken in the names of relatives; such as the colonnade and basilica of his grandsons Gaius and Lucius;

Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Augustus*, XXIX[78]

The corollary between Augustus' family and public commemoration was made obvious; no privacy of mourning was envisaged, and public access to aid remembrance appeared to be encouraged. Visual imagery, as Zanker mentions[79], was replete with metaphor and symbolism, and was utilized to reinforce Augustus' message: control of public space rested,

[74] 'patron of the arts'
[75] 'Theatre of Marcellus'
[76] Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*, (Oxford, 2010), 275.
[77] The temples are translated thus: Temple of Bellona?; Temple of Jove; Temple of Juno; Temple of Hercules of the Muses
[78] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Augustus, XXIX*, 62.
[79] Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 18.

solely, in aristocratic (or 'imperial') hands. Whether through familial commemoration, or through, as Suetonius states, the early urgings of Augustus to his associates 'to embellish the city with new public monuments or to restore and improve ancient ones'[80], thereby, creating *publica magnificentia*[81], the voice of the *princeps* resounded. This position would change to one of 'imperial' family monopoly, with less opportunity for the expression of others, as stated earlier. Additionally, through *publica magnificentia*, the importance of *publica munificentia*[82] also prevailed; Vitruvius' earlier statement rings true, regarding the beneficent Augustus and legacy aspects of the built environment of Rome, and the extended empire.

## CONCLUSION

The built environment of Rome, particularly for our time period, reflected social, religious and political changes on a grand scale. That these things were under the auspices of one man – Augustus – is significant, for two reasons: the number of visual markers and reminders attest to the duration, as much as the success, of his Principate; and the immense scope of works undertaken to redeem and revamp Rome illustrate his, and others', commitment and expenditure toward the 'idea' of a resplendent Rome. That these reasons are also riven through with the personal control of Augustus seems obvious. Where someone like Favro asserts that '[…] choreographed experiences, imprinted signs and symbols, and unifying narratives […] have the power to affix in the memory'[83], it is, however, difficult to confirm that this was the case for the vast majority in Rome; the built environment reflected hierarchical control, both in an aristocratic and in an individual sense, and evidence for participatory zeal on the part of the *populi Romani* is scant and unconvincing. What is clear is that the Roman *nobilitas*, by active participation or exhortation, were able to leave their imprint upon the city landscape, allowing monumental Rome to speak to us of them. This brings us to the conclusion that, much like prior, individualistic, civic blandishments of earlier Republican times, those improvements to the fabric of Rome undertaken and completed by Augustus and his associates may very well be taken to communicate personal statements of power and control, rather than conscious improving gestures for the benefit of all. Not to disprove a personal argument, it is also evident that an individual – in this case, Agrippa, not Augustus – could embody a selfless principle of beautification and 'giving' that revolved around the idea of Rome, as represented by its people. This is balanced against an earlier statement concerning the potential for Agrippa to be celebrating triumphs by another method.

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[80] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Augustus, XXIX*, 62.
[81] Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, 135ff.; NB: the term is translated 'public magnificence'
[82] 'generous public gift'
[83] Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*, 2.

With this, it seems appropriate to give the final word to, some might suggest, the last free voice of the Roman Republic, before Augustus' Principate morphed in to a closed imperial dynasty (and he was exiled):

> There was crude simplicity before: now Rome is golden,
> and owns the vast wealth of the conquered world.
> Look what the Capitol is now, and what it was:
> you'd say it belonged to a different Jove.
> The Senate-House, now worthy of such debates,
> was made of wattle when Tatius held the kingship.
> Where the Palatine now gleams with Apollo and our leaders,
> what was that but pasture for ploughmen's oxen?
> Others may delight in ancient times: I congratulate myself
> on having been born just now: this age suits my nature.

Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, III.113-122[84]

[84] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* (Works of Love)*, III*, trans. A. S. Kline (2001), taken from <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/ArtofLoveBkIII.htm> [Accessed 28.1.13] NB: this version has been used for its clarity and adherence to the Latin text (see <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.artis3.shtml>), rather than the Perseus version in rhyming couplets.

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# Chinese voices behind 'The Great Firewall': exploring the emergence of civil society in the wake of the digital revolution in China

Rose Scarfe-James

The advent of the digital revolution has brought about a change in the nature of political engagement in China. The Internet and digital technologies have broadened the horizons of China's net citizens and despite rigorous censorship and intervention on the part of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); voices are being heard from behind the 'Great Firewall'. With more than 500 million Internet users, Chinese citizens are a huge online presence, consequences of which include an explosion in blogging culture, cyber vigilantism and user-generated media content. It is clear that the Internet has empowered Chinese citizens in both the online and offline spheres. These developments have prompted scholars to contemplate whether there is a form of civil society developing in China in the wake of the digital revolution. However a culturally attuned conception of civil society must be developed in order to discuss an emerging Chinese civil society with any meaningful outcomes.

The impact of the digital revolution on Western democracies is clear and measurable, whereas its effect on China is rather more difficult to pin down. Some scholars offer bold claims about the potential impacts, claiming 'the Internet bestows upon civil society a selection of fundamentally new communication strategies that have the capacity to transform […] more traditional approaches to political behaviour'.[1] However, most scholars are more moderate in their observations; China is an authoritarian state in the grip of the Chinese Communist Party and the prospects of the digital revolution have not always been welcome. There has undoubtedly been an opening of public discourses and consequently this has meant a rise in potential opportunities for political engagement on the part of net citizens or 'netizens'[2] as they have been called. Whether this change constitutes the formation or strengthening of civil society is yet to be seen. In order to investigate these concepts and effects, this article explores the prospects for civil society, including issues surrounding voice and empowerment, in the context of the digital revolution through three key themes: civil society in the context of China and 'The West'; the Internet, the CCP and its 'Netizens', and finally social unrest and the digital age.

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[1] G.D. Rawnsley, 'The Media, Internet and Governance in China' in (eds) Y. Zheng & J. Fewsmith, *China's Opening Society: The Non-State Sector and Governance* (London, 2008), 126.
[2] A. Esaray & X. Qiang, 'Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere: Below the Radar', *Asian Survey*, 48 (2008), 753.

## CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINA AND 'THE WEST'

Before assessing the prospects for Chinese civil society we must first look to interrogate the idea of a civil society itself. What characteristics represent a strong civil society and does China possess them? The concept of a civil society is familiar to a Western academic audience, conjuring images of participation and community, but as Howell and Pearce point out 'some scholars [have] questioned the applicability of such a concept, which had its roots in the European Enlightenment, to a society and culture so different as China'.[3] Indeed this lasting association with European politics, and by extension liberal democracy, may prove to be an inappropriate measure for China's relationship with the concepts of civil society and the digital revolution.

Peterson and Van Til's article usefully identifies a set of criteria which can be used to assess the strength of civil society in a given setting. They outline civil society as characterised by 'open, public decision making for all community members' and 'strong, active, vibrant, diverse community-based groups that […] seek to promote the common good'.[4] The implication here is also that a strong civil society allows its citizens to speak, to have their voices heard, but can this be applied to China? Are Chinese voices being heard? The Peterson and Van Til approach is undoubtedly a Western lens but it is nonetheless useful as a basic working model of the idea of civil society. Under this definition, an analysis of China's civil society could be rather short lived, particularly in relation to the CCP's control of the Internet, which will be discussed in further detail later. Therefore, it is safe to assume that a broader, more culturally attuned idea of civil society must be engaged with in order to discuss the case of China with any meaningful outcomes.

To pursue this more culturally attuned conception of civil society, we must place it in the historical context of China; only then can we assess the ways in which it has developed and the particular influence of the digital revolution upon this development. As Des Forges put it, it is vital to 'take the idea of civil society out of its modern Western context and place it in the larger context of Chinese history'. He goes on to suggest that the 'Chinese have long appreciated the values of moral community and public welfare, which are valuable complements to current Western ideas of liberal democracy and private enterprise'.[5] Indeed,

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[3] J. Howell & J. Pearce, 'The Case of China' in their *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration.* (London, 2001), 124.
[4] T. J. Peterson and J. Van Til, 'Defining Characteristics of Civil Society', *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, 6.2 (2004). Available: <http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol6iss2/art_5.htm> [Accessed 19.11.12]
[5] R.V. Des Forges, 'States, Societies and Civil Societies in Chinese History' in T. Brook and B. Michael Frolic (eds.) *Civil Society in China* (New York, 1997), 68.

referring back to our earlier criteria, the ideas of 'community' and the 'common good'[6] resonate strongly with the culture of Confucianism, upon which China is partly founded. However, as China moved away from the ideas of Confucianism and towards Chinese Communism, these concepts of freely associating community have become harder for citizens to fulfil. In light of this, there are clear historical precedents for a Chinese sympathy with the values of civil society.

Scholars have also pointed out the role of *dazibao* (big character posters) which were the 'medium of choice for expressing political dissent' in the pre-digital period.[7] These large posters were placed in prominent areas and allowed citizens to openly criticise the state with a certain element of anonymity. In fact the practise created a voice for citizens in the pre-digital period similar to that currently being cultivated by the Internet. As Sheng puts it '*dazibao* reach a relatively wide audience at minimum costs and provide some anonymity for the writer. Because of these unique characteristics *dazibao* represents one of the few effective vestiges of free speech that may be used to voice political dissent in China'.[8] This could easily be a contemporary description of the impact of the digital revolution; it has created a space for Chinese voices. These posters were subsequently banned as the CCP became uncomfortable with their critical messages; however, the digital revolution has gone some way to reviving these lost avenues of political engagement which once existed in China.

Not only is the concept of civil society inherently Western, it is also fundamentally linked with the liberal democratic model; a model to which China clearly does not subscribe. Therefore, discussions of China in relation to civil society are often vastly preoccupied with China's prospects for democratisation and the part that the digital revolution will play in this process. MacKinnon explicitly links these two ideas in the context of the emergence of the Internet in China: 'the Internet may also be enabling the development of "civil society" and public discourse around policy that could make gradual evolution toward democracy more likely over the long run'.[9] In fact, many scholars would argue that a democratic state and a strong civil society are inextricably linked and without one there is no hope of the other. By this measure China is neither democratic nor in possession of a developed civil society; it could be argued, however, that elements of a civil society are currently *developing* in China. In addition, scholars such as Thornton have questioned the 'pervasive myth […] the Internet is a powerful force for democracy', and the 'deeply held suspicion that attempts to restrict full

[6] Peterson & Van Til, 'The Defining Characteristics of Civil Society'.
[7] Esaray & Qiang, 'Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere', 761.
[8] H. Sheng, 'Big Character Posters in China: A Historical Survey' *Journal of Chinese Law*, 4 (1990), 234.
[9] R. MacKinnon, 'Flatter World and Thicker Walls? Blogs, Censorship and Civic Discourse in China', *Public Choice*, 134 (2008), 34.

access to the web slow inevitable progress towards political liberalization'.[10] She goes on to comment that 'the link between democracy, political liberalization, and the Internet is tenuous at best'.[11] If this link is far from concrete, as Thornton suggests, then there is infinitely more room for discussing the development of civil society in China without needing to continually refer to the likelihood of its eventual democratisation.

## THE INTERNET: THE CCP AND ITS 'NETIZENS'

In light of these discussions about the nature of civil society, we can now begin to consider the impact which the digital revolution may be having on its development. Discussions of the digital revolution have become synonymous with the Internet. This is certainly the largest component of the new digital age but it is not the only one. Alongside the Internet there is also the rise of digital film and photography which has expanded the public's capability to capture, and more importantly share, images. Therefore with reference to the term 'digital revolution', this article will discuss both the rise of the Internet and associated technologies, such as social media and digital imagery. The Internet is at the core of the digital revolution but all of these technologies have the potential to offer advances in the development of civil society and citizen empowerment.

As previously noted, the ways in which the Chinese Communist Party restricts civil society are many and varied; strict government regulation of NGO activity, media censorship, Internet filtering and the widespread presence of so-called 'cybercops' being just a few of these concerns. Of these elements, the CCP's monitoring and censorship of the Internet will be our main area of scrutiny. The OpenNet Initiative, which assesses the extent to which different countries and regions offer open access to the Internet, has called the regime in China 'one of the most pervasive and sophisticated regimes of Internet filtering and information control in the world'. [12] This is demonstrated by the sheer number of aforementioned 'cybercops'. Up to 30,000 full time cybercops operate in China to 'selectively block foreign news sites and terminate domestic sites publishing politically sensitive information'.[13] In spite of this, the state and its citizens have both taken advantage of the benefits that the digital revolution has to offer.

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[10] P. Thornton, 'Censorship and Surveillance in Chinese Cyberspace: Beyond the 'Great Firewall'' in (eds) P. Gries & S. Rosen, *Chinese Politics: State, Society and the Market* (New York, 2010), 182.
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] OpenNet Initiative, *Country Profile: China* (Online, 2012). Available: <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/china-including-hong-kong>, 1 [Accessed 3.12.12]
[13] J. Chung, 'Comparing Online Activities in China and South Korea: The Internet and the Political Regime' *Asian Survey*, 48 (2008), 735.

China's phenomenal economic growth is a fantastic example of the unique way China can make seemingly incongruous ideas compatible with its own brand of socialism. The success of China's market reform strategy is in itself remarkable but perhaps more so is the construction of a "market economy with Chinese characteristics". This hybrid system represents the way in which China has managed to glean the powerful political and economic benefits of a system (capitalism) which it publicly distances itself from. The CCP has embraced the Internet with just this selective vision, intending to utilise it for its own ends. It quickly became obvious to Chinese leadership that the rise of the Internet and associated technologies should not be ignored simply due to fears of Western encroachment. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from the *People's Daily,* the official paper of the Chinese State: 'as long as we use more ways of properly looking at the Internet, we can make use of the best parts, we can go for the good and stay away from the bad and we use it for our purposes, then we can turn it around on them'.[14] Given the inherent nationalist bias of the paper, this ominous reference to 'them' presumably refers to a perceived Western opposition.

The CCP are not the only ones who recognised the transformative potential of the Internet; grand predictions were made about the impact that the digital revolution could have in China. Among these is the now well-known piece by *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof, in which he mused that 'the Chinese communist party […] may finally have met its match - the Internet […] the Chinese leadership is digging the Communist Party's grave, by giving the Chinese people broadband'.[15] This prediction has not come to fruition as of yet, despite Chinese net users measured at 513 million, far outstripping numbers in the United States.[16] Therefore the idea of the Internet being 'associated with democratic political communication'[17] is put under direct scrutiny once again. Despite the bleak picture of censorship painted by commentators such as Kristof, the Internet has proved to be a vibrant community in which 'it is misleading to imagine that Chinese netizens have been paralyzed or silenced by the operation of Chinese censors'.[18] Despite this vast number of internet users it must also be noted that most people in China still do not have access to the internet, amounting to a penetration rate of less than 40%.[19]

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[14] MacKinnon, 'Flatter World and Thicker Walls?', 33.
[15] N. Kristof, 'Death by a Thousand Blogs' in *The New York Times* (Online, 2005) Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/24/opinion/24kristoff.html?_r=0> [Accessed 3.12.12]
[16] China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), *The 29th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*, 13. Available: <http://www1.cnnic.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201209/P020120904421720687608.pdf> [Accessed: 28.2.13]
[17] Rawnsley, 'The Media, Internet and Governance in China', 126.
[18] Thornton, *Beyond the 'Great Firewall',* 194
[19] CNNIC, *The 29th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*, 13.

Chinese netizens have utilised the Internet in a number of ways; one of the most prominent phenomenon is blogging. The sheer numbers of blogs and bloggers are striking, with 309 million users of the Chinese blogging site *Weibo* as of the end of December 2012.[20] So, what are these 300+ million users blogging and reading about? Unlike in the West, where many blogs have specialist topics or interests, most blogs in China vary in content and tend to reflect bloggers' personal thoughts and feelings on a variety of subjects. Bloggers do, however, use their online sphere to express criticisms, and Esaray and Qiang find that 'blogging has provided citizens of the People's Republic with a medium for making sophisticated critiques of the regime without encountering harsh repression'.[21] Through tactical use of language which bypasses the strict filters of the Internet censors, netizens have been able to question their government in a way that would be impossible in traditional print media. This is expressed by the netizens gathered at the 'first ever Chinese bloggers' conference in Shanghai', blogs are described as a place to 'speak the truth and hear the truth' and as a way to 'share information freely'.[22] Chinese bloggers clearly feel that the Internet has enhanced possibilities for open discourse in China.

A prime example of the way blogging has been used to voice carefully-worded political resistance is the case of Huang Laoxie. Huang wrote an extensive blog post which criticized 'the ineffectiveness and rubber-stamp tendencies of China's largest representative bodies'. If impressions of the 'Great Firewall' are to be believed, this is surely the type of content which censors would seize upon immediately.[23] In reality, Huang's clever use of diverting language meant that he could phrase the criticism in a way which made it difficult for censors to deem it subversive. For example, he preceded his criticism with the following disclaimer 'This site has a lot of content that is not factually reliable. My intention is to trick you and tease you'.[24] The awareness of censorship shown on Huang's part, and on the part of netizens who undoubtedly understood his thinly veiled message, shows how 'publics and counter-publics in Chinese cyberspace remain fully cognizant of the censorship and surveillance to which they are subjected on the web'.[25] This is just one example of many which show netizens working alongside the strict censorship guidelines while still voicing their concerns.

It is therefore clear that the Internet has fostered avenues of political engagement that would be impossible in other forms, such as print media. While using the Western framework of

[20] CNNIC, *The 31st Statistical Report on Internet Development in China* (Online, 2013) Available: http://www1.cnnic.cn/AU/MediaC/rdxw/hotnews/201302/t20130222_38848.htm [Accessed 28.2.13]
[21] Esaray & Qiang, 'Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere', 752.
[22] MacKinnon, 'Flatter World and Thicker Walls?', 42.
[23] Esaray & Qiang, 'Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere', 762.
[24] *Ibid*., 763.
[25] Thornton, 'Censorship and Surveillance in Chinese Cyberspace', 190.

civil society outlined earlier, these developments represent limited progress toward the ideal of 'open, public decision making for all community members'[26], particularly given the low internet penetration rate we discussed earlier, although this is rising all the time. However, as Esaray and Qiang point out, 'unlike Westerners, who commonly compare freedom of speech in China to freedom of speech in democracies, Chinese bloggers compare their present freedom to the more restricted environment they encountered in the past'.[27] This is perhaps the more 'culturally attuned' idea of civil society which was alluded to earlier; in these terms there have been significant steps forward for Chinese netizens in realising a more active, vocal and empowered role in their political sphere.

## SOCIAL UNREST AND THE DIGITAL AGE

So far we have discussed the online ramifications of increased political engagement, but what are the offline consequences? One of the key characteristics of a developed civil society is the right to organise and protest; a right which the CCP does not allow. The effect of the digital revolution on the way citizens raise their concerns verbally has been profound, but what is the effect on the way citizens raise their concerns in a physical sense (that is, through protest, social unrest and civil action)? This section will explore its impact in two forms: the effect that the Internet has had in bringing about social unrest, and the role it plays in recording and disseminating the results of social unrest. These effects will be investigated through two compelling case studies: the 2009 Urumqi riots in Xinjiang province, and the emergence of the *renrou sousuo yinqing* phenomenon*,* literally, and somewhat morbidly, translated as the 'human flesh search engine' effect.[28] The CCP's reaction to these events will also be explored.

In 2009, riots exploded in Urumqi between Han Chinese and Uighur Muslim Chinese in the aftermath of a brawl between workers from both groups at a toy factory.[29] This was one in a sequence of clashes between the two groups; however this was the most violent yet - leaving up to 140 dead and 1,400 in police custody. There was an immense online reaction to the unfolding violence: 'pictures, videos and updates from Urumqi poured onto social networking and image sharing websites such as Twitter, YouTube and Flickr'.[30] In response to this the CCP shut down internet access almost immediately and removed details of the unrest from

[26] Peterson & Van Til, 'Defining Characteristics of Civil Society'.
[27] Esaray and Qiang, 'Political Expression in the Chinese Blogosphere', 770.
[28] Thornton, 'Censorship and Surveillance in Chinese Cyberspace', 191.
[29] Anon., 'Riots Engulf Chinese Uiguhr City', *BBC News* (Online, 2009) Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/8137824.stm> [Accessed 4.12.12]
[30] Anon., 'China riots: Twitter and YouTube frustrate "censorship attempts"'. *Telegraph Online* (2009). Available: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/5756766/China-riots-Twitter-and YouTube-frustrate-censorship-attempts.html#> [Accessed 3.12.12]

websites, while the official response to the rioting was to blame exiled Uighur separatists.[31] There is historical precedence for this type of behaviour from the CCP; access to Bulletin Board Services[32] 'was suspended in 1997 after Deng Xiao-Ping's death, as a precaution to prevent anything inappropriate being said online'.[33] The internet blackout and obvious propaganda which followed the Urumqi riots was rejected by many Chinese netizens and so they set about flooding the internet with their images, videos and stories. Despite the internet blackout, this information seeped into the wider international sphere.

As this blackout period began it became clear that web users outside of China were making a concerted effort to store and archive these stories[34], ensuring that the experiences of those on the ground were shared by the international community. The reposting of stories and pictures on servers outside China, effectively logging them beyond the reach of the CCP, gave the voices of those in Urumqi power and volume. In this case, the global connections created by the Internet allowed those outside the country, particularly in 'The West', to draw on their own perceptions of civil society, free speech and protest, and apply them to China. Interestingly, the CCP did not cut off coverage of the riots entirely. Quite the opposite in fact; foreign journalists were invited to cover the story.[35] However, it quickly became clear that 'journalists were confined to the city of Urumqi and permitted to cover violence instigated by Uighur citizens only'.[36] In light of this, capturing voices and stories at their source from those involved becomes all the more important.

This dissemination of information was fuelled by public disgust at the violence, the heavy-handed police intervention in the rioting and the subsequent effort to cover-up these interventions; the response being to utilise digital media and the Internet to disseminate the real story of the riots. There is also an interesting clash here between online and offline media as the *Telegraph* article points out: 'state-run China Central Television (CCTV) showed its first images of the violence just before midday Monday - more than 12 hours after the footage began circulating on the Internet'.[37] However, any hope of this citizen-generated information informing domestic media is halted by central government legislation, which forbids state media from referencing user-generated online content and is designed to 'put constraints on

[31] B. Blanchard, 'China tightens Web screws after Xinjiang riot'. *Reuters* (2009). Available: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/07/06/us-china-xinjiang-Internet-idUSTRE5651K420090706> [Accessed 3.12.12]
[32] BBS was an early type of public internet forum.
[33] S. Li, 'The Online Public Space and Popular Ethos in China', *Media, Culture and Society*, 32 (2010), 69.
[34] Anon., 'China Riots', *Telegraph Online*
[35] Anon., 'Riots in Xinjiang: Is China Fraying?', *The Economist* (2009) Available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/13988479> [Accessed 26.2.12]
[36] OpenNet, *Country Profile: China*, 274.
[37] Anon., 'China Riots', *Telegraph Online*

the publishing industry and news media to separate the online and offline public discussion space'.[38] It is clear to see from the events surrounding the Urumqi riots, the effect which the digital revolution has had on the dissemination of information relating to social unrest.

The digital revolution has not only affected the way in which events are reported but has also begun to bring about cases of civil action in and of itself. The so-called 'human flesh search engine' is a fairly recent phenomenon, in which 'thousands of volunteer cyber-vigilantes unite to expose the personal details of perceived evildoers and publish them on the Web'.[39] This practice exudes a sense of social justice, as netizens seek to right perceived wrongs in their society. Although the first victims of this public shaming were of little political significance, netizens have gone on to tackle political figures such as the then Party Secretary of the Shenzhen Maritime Administration, Lin Jiaxiang. His conduct in a restaurant (he grabbed a young girl by the neck and allegedly attempted to molest her) and his subsequent arrogant outburst in his own defence, were captured on video and posted on YouTube. The online reaction to this was explosive; he was quickly identified, reported, and subsequently fired, with a promise that he would also be 'severely punished'.[40] The power exerted here by an angry Chinese online community is clearly demonstrated.

In the West, where privacy laws are rigorous and the publication of personal details without permission is illegal, these demonstrations of public agency can seem to be 'the online equivalent of lynch mobs'.[41] Nevertheless, in the Chinese context, despite some fairly extreme cases, these expressions allow netizens to actively hold to account those that govern them. Civil society is traditionally an important check on the accountability of those in power; the Internet is currently supporting this process in China. Li, by contrast, is less convinced by this theory. His views on the state of China's online public sphere are rather more pessimistic: 'the online sphere was transformed from a site encouraging civic virtue to a market place encouraging sensational performance and voyeuristic peeping'.[42] It seems clear from these case studies, however, that the Internet is offering netizens more than the opportunity for 'voyeuristic peeping'. The digital revolution has advanced citizens' possibilities for voicing their concerns, which is a key requirement of civil society, in both online and offline scenarios. Digital mobilisation following the social unrest in Urumqi allowed a light to be shone on the injustices perpetrated there. Mobilisation is the key here: the digital revolution in

[38] Li, 'The Online Public Space and Popular Ethos in China', 71.
[39] C. O'Brien, 'The Human Flesh Search Engine', *Forbes* (Online, 2008) Available: <http://www.forbes.com/2008/11/21/human-flesh-search-tech-identity08-cx_cb_1121obrien.html> [Accessed 4.12.12]
[40] Thornton, 'Censorship and Surveillance in Chinese Cyberspace', 192.
[41] O'Brien, 'Human Flesh Search Engine', *Forbes*
[42] Li, 'The Online Public Space and Popular Ethos in China', 73.

these cases has allowed for citizens to mobilise both physically and intellectually against perceived wrongdoing in both the public and political spheres. The huge numbers of people taking part online in these mobilisations also offers a certain amount of protection from government pressure.

## CONCLUSION

Any analysis of Chinese society through a strictly Western lens of civil society would be fairly futile. Rigid conceptions of civil society which are linked only to the likelihood of democratisation fail to appreciate the subtleties of the Chinese public sphere. They also ignore pre-existing qualities of Chinese society which resemble Western democratic norms. This article has sought to create an idea of civil society which draws on these existing definitions, while integrating uniquely Chinese concepts; this has proven to be a much more rewarding approach. Using a collaborative definition such as this reveals the ways in which the digital revolution has most definitely enhanced prospects for the empowerment of citizens, both online and offline. Despite extensive and pervasive censoring, the online sphere in China has much to offer its netizens. The world of blogging has allowed previously unprecedented levels of self-expression and even politically sensitive views can be voiced if done so with care.

Western critics are often quick to dismiss this freedom because of the undisputable control which the CCP exerts over the Internet. Although much of this criticism is justified, it often overlooks the progress that this freedom represents in a Chinese context. This freedom is also expressed in the reaction to and creation of, social unrest and civil action respectively. In these spheres, the digital revolution has allowed the Chinese public to hold their leaders and each other to an enhanced level of accountability – a trait which even Western critics must surely appreciate. All of these concepts combine to create a picture of Chinese civil society which is certainly much richer, more diverse and more able to hold its leaders to account, thanks to the advent of the digital revolution.

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# Walls have mouths: architectural emblems in the Glasgow City Chambers

Kirsten Somerville

Architectural sculpture may often be overlooked or dismissed as mere aesthetic embellishment, but on closer examination, important messages may be contained within it. Specifically, it can be used in a uniquely emblematic way to project certain ideologies of power. This emblematic process involves the recombination of various fragmented signs and allusions into new forms by the viewer to arrive at a meaning. It is argued that such a process is employed extensively in the architectural sculptures of the Glasgow City Chambers building as a powerful tool to communicate Victorian ideals of power and value. The power of the emblem in architecture can only be appreciated through a multi-disciplinary approach, incorporating architectural, historical and literary methodologies.

The emblematic figures of architectural sculpture are designed precisely to tell stories; stories of a city's history, what it valued and how it wanted to be seen, as decided by the powerful few. Those in control of the design of public buildings gave a voice to these architectural figures, and thus imparted the power to speak to the public about what, and who, is valuable to society. This article will outline some important methodological considerations in the study of architectural emblems, as well as tracing the history of their use in communicating power. It will then examine in detail a local case study of the City Chambers building in Glasgow city centre, aiming to highlight the way in which emblematics in the architecture can be seen to reveal certain aspects of the political and cultural values of the Victorian era in which the building was largely developed.

It is important to note from the outset that a particular methodological approach is needed for the study of architecture as emblem. This approach incorporates methodologies from a range of disciplines: one must consider the architecture of the building itself, the history of its construction and use, as well as the literature and other cultural forms which may have informed the composition of the emblematic figures. Judi Loach, a 'hybrid academic, trained in architecture, architectural history and literature'[1], notes that the academic study of emblems has hitherto been predominantly from the literary perspective, focusing on the analysis of

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[1] J. Loach 'Architecture and Emblematics: Issues in Interpretation', in (ed.) A. Adams, *Emblems and Art History: Nine Essays* (Glasgow, 1996), 2.

particular emblem books.[2] She suggests ways in which we might bridge this apparent methodological gap by considering issues raised by four key properties specific to architecture, namely: 'spatiality, sequentiality and simultaneity, architecture's role as the setting for ceremony or performance, and the communal nature of the experience'.[3] In her article, Loach makes reference mostly to emblems in Renaissance and Baroque architecture in Lyon, and suggests that these emblems can be best understood by analysis of their intended environment. In order to best understand these emblems we must appeal to a conceptual reconstruction of their locations' physical and perceived environment, a conceptual reconstruction of the ceremonies and performances held within this environment, and the consideration of the sensory experience of this environment. Although some of Loach's suggestions might appear specifically suited to the understanding of architecture from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, which are both temporally and culturally distant from modern and contemporary times – for example, aspects relating to royal entry ceremonies and festivals – it is nonetheless a very useful guide to notable aspects of architectural study. There are particularities in the way emblems function in the built environment (as opposed to on the printed page of an emblem book), which stem from the way that they are encountered, animated and experienced. These methods of conceptual reconstruction should not be forgotten when analysing architecture from any time period.

It is important to establish exactly what is meant by an 'emblem'. After the first named 'emblem book', Alciato's *Livret des Emblemes,* was published in French in 1536, its popularity inspired a new genre of literature that focused on the text-image combination. Conventionally each emblem comprised of a picture, a title and a short verse text;[4] this form appealed to the hybrid visual-textual culture, which developed with the rise of literacy after the visual culture of the Middle Ages. This allowed emblem books to remain popular until the late 17th century.[5] However, emblems do not exclusively exist within literature. The use of specific emblems outside of the printed book, for example in architecture and interior decoration, is not a new idea but rather one that was there from the very beginning of the genre's development, and indeed was actively encouraged by some authors of emblem books.[6]

It is also clear that emblems' influence on culture extended far beyond the individual emblems composed and published by known authors. Emblems that were created off the page

[2] *Ibid*., 1.
[3] *Ibid*., 2.
[4] D. Russell, '1536: Emblems', in (ed.) D. Hollier, *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, 1989), 168.
[5] *Ibid*., 171.
[6] D. Russell, *Emblematic Structures in Renaissance French Culture* (Toronto, 1995), 214.

were also extremely important. In the words of the emblem historian Daniel Russell, emblems were 'taken very seriously and understood as a particularly potent means of communication'.[7] It is therefore important to explain the workings of applied emblematics and how certain images may be understood in an emblematic way, without necessarily being lifted and reproduced exactly from an original published source. Russell identifies such an 'emblematic process' by distinguishing it from the interpretation of medieval allegory which only has a single intrinsic meaning to be deciphered:

> [T]he emblematic processing of traditional materials would seem to involve two distinct sequential procedures consisting, at least by implication, of the fragmentation of well-known allegorical works or traditional sign systems and the subsequent recombination of fragmented elements of them into new and striking signifying units.[8]

Writing specifically on court culture, he argues: 'when […] a fragmentary motif or allusion in painting or discourse can be interpreted only in an allegorical way, it becomes […] an emblematic image'.[9] Thus, the essence of the emblematic image lies in its fragmentation of allusions which must be pieced together by the viewer themself, who will be – according to the various sign systems available to them – combining the conveyed information and the implied references to arrive at a meaning. This could be visualised as a kind of 'conversation' between the figures in the emblematic image and the viewer. It is this interaction between the voices of the observer and the observed that gives the emblem its unique cultural power.

Historically, emblems as architectural decoration have existed as more than the simple reproduction of printed emblems. They can often be seen to operate in accordance with Russell's 'emblematic process'. In *Emblematic Structures in Renaissance French Culture*, Russell notes the development of emblematic decoration in light of the development of the emblem phenomenon in general:

> Although by the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, complete emblems were commonly used in programs of interior decoration […] such an explicit use of emblematics was rare in the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries […] The reason is, I think, that early in the period no need was felt to signal the emblematic, whereas by the eighteenth century, with its increasingly naturalistic view of the world, the emblematic needed more than ever to be bracketed, framed, and set apart from the surrounding world.[10]

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[7] Russell, '1536: Emblems', 167-168. He goes on to note, for example, the extensive use of emblems by the Jesuits as a 'rhetorical matrix in structuring sermons' and 'a highly prized pedagogical tool in religious schools', as well as the teaching of emblem composition in Jesuit colleges', 170.
[8] D. Russell, 'The Emblem and Device in France', *Series: French Forum Monographs*, Vol 59 (Lexington, 1985), 164.
[9] D. Russell, *Emblematic Structures in Renaissance French Culture*, 193.
[10] *Ibid*., 194.

There are numerous examples of 'such an explicit use of emblematics' in the décor of court ceremonies, royal entries, marriages, festivals and processions in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century France. Surely the best example from this era is the Palace of Versailles, a landscape conceived precisely as an all-encompassing emblematic experience, produced to convey the perfection and wonder of Louis XIV's absolute monarchy. In itself, his sun device was designed to portray his image as an all-powerful ruler, and this is reflected at every scale in the design of the Palace and its grounds. From the gardens' central axis, themed around the sun's progress throughout the day, radiated a whole host of other displays. These features varied from the labyrinth, with its technologically and visually magnificent fountains, to the gardens, with their exotic fruit and flowers brought under symmetrical control. Even the experience of vistors within this space added to the emblematic quality of the landscape. The guided visits led visitors' movements in a strictly controlled direction, and the musical and theatrical entertainments of festivals were laden with symbolism and iconography (of the sun and Apollo). Each and every detail was designed to communicate the Sun King's power and embody his *Nec pluribus impar* device.[11] From the example of Versailles we get a sense of the importance of the uniquely architectural aspects of the emblematic functions as outlined by Loach. It is the combined impact of the spatiality (the layout of the Palace), the sequentiality and simultaneity (the directed movement around the palace and omnipresence of iconography), the setting (for complementary entertainments) and the communality of the experience (its importance in the common memory of the citizenry) that render Versailles such a powerful ideological tool. As Grove summarises: 'Throughout, mystery leads to marvel as the beholder pieces together visual effect, sensory perception and intellectual context'.[12]

The metaphoric 'voice' of emblems has been utilized to communicate power since their early development. Versailles was a key example of such processes at the peak of the emblematic age. At the time of its construction and initial reception, the emblem was a well-established and self-aware genre, with commentaries and theories on its workings. A notable example is Ripa's definitive guide, *Iconologie*, from which artists and architects could draw inspiration; Russell notes the importance of such works in consolidating the various sign systems/codes available to Renaissance artists.[13] The emblem format, and emblematic age, is conventionally understood to have died out after Louis XIV, towards the mid-eighteenth century. But to argue that this was the end of its influence in wider culture is to ignore a wealth of evidence

[11] L. Grove, 'Multi-Media Emblems and their Modern-Day Counterparts', in (eds.) A.J. Harper, *et al*., *Emblematic Tendencies in the Art and Literature of the Twentieth Century*, 10, (Glasgow, 2005), 171.
[12] *Ibid.*, 175.
[13] D. Russell, 'The Emblem and Device in France', *Series: French Forum Monographs,* vol 59 (Lexington, 1985), 173.

to the contrary. In architecture, emblematic influences can be seen in examples ranging from the Victorian era to the present day. The literature on applied emblematics has tended to focus on Renaissance architecture, but it is interesting to note that Grove's paper compares Versailles function to the emblematic functioning of Disneyland Paris. According to Grove, Disneyland uses similar strategies of cultural enticement to that of Versailles, but to communicate an ideology of North American capitalism. He argues that the employment of such processes in Disneyland is a mark of 'the second emblematic age'[14] in contemporary culture. If this is the case, let us not forget the preceding peak in the emblem's historical rise and fall – the Victorian revival. This period saw an 'exponential growth of sculpture'[15] in terms of both monuments and architectural decoration – the latter being deemed 'an equally, if not more fertile breeding ground for significant work'.[16] In this article, the case study will focus on an area constructed during the Victorian era in central Glasgow, at the peak of its position as 'Second City of the Empire'. I contend that a revival of elements of Renaissance-style emblematic architecture can be seen, yet this time reworked to illustrate the Victorian-Imperial values of trade, knowledge and honour, extending from the Second City to the rest of the world.

In the early 1880s, City Architect John Carrick was asked to propose a site for new purpose-built Council offices, following a series of relocations as the city's population and council's responsibilities continued to expand. The design of the eventual City Chambers was executed by Paisley-born, London-based and Glasgow-trained architect William Young, after he was chosen as the winner of two competitions which drew hundreds of entries. It was a grandiose design, conceived as a status symbol of Glasgow's industrial wealth and prosperity at the height of the empire. We get a sense of the symbolic importance of this building from the grand ceremony conducted around the laying of the foundation stone by the Lord Provost, John Ure, on 6th October 1883. The date was made a public holiday and all public works were suspended. An estimated 600,000 spectators gathered to watch a number of trade and Masonic processions – which converged on George Square, decorated with temporary triumphal arches and later the scene of fireworks displays – before the ceremonial laying of the stone commenced.[17] In short, it was not at all dissimilar to the proceedings of Renaissance royal entries that Loach detailed or the entertainments at Versailles as outlined by Grove, with a slight alteration in the cause of the celebrations – once the personal virtues of a monarch became the blossoming of a city into a global centre of trade and industry. Following Loach

[14] *Ibid.*, 187.
[15] R. McKenzie, 'Public Sculpture of Glasgow', *Series: Public Sculpture of Britain*, vol. 5, (Liverpool, 2002), xiii.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] *Ibid.*, 149-151.

and Grove, it is important to remember how sensory experience can enhance the emblematic experience in architecture. One can imagine the sense of shared civic pride felt by the crowds of spectators as the trades that made Glasgow were paraded through its streets, and the saturation of the senses as the national anthem was sung in George Square. The new heart of the city was finely decorated for the occasion. Taking advantage of her visit to the grand imperial event of the International Exhibition at Kelvingrove Park, the City Chambers was officially inaugurated by the imperial leader herself, Queen Victoria, on 22nd August 1888. The following year, the first council meetings were held there and the building was opened to the public, attracting 400,000 visitors in ten days.[18]

The City Chambers' architect himself described the building's architecture as 'a free and dignified treatment of the Renaissance'.[19] It is evident from the extensive use of detailed architectural sculpture in the design that there was a conscious effort to replicate the emblematic function present in so many grand buildings from the aforementioned era. We have already seen how, following Russell's understanding, the emblematic process can be understood as a fragmentation and recombination of commonly known sign systems. The sculptural embellishments of the City Chambers building employ this process in a number of examples that recombine classical figures and symbols with known symbols and allusions from the era of its production, which resulted in a building that operates on a number of levels as emblematic of Glasgow and its status as a leading city on a global scale.

Let us begin by analysing the pediment on the George Square façade above the main entrance (see Fig. 1) and examining how the sculpted figures situated there speak of historical power structures. The pediment is not only visually the most arresting and sculpturally the most elaborate component; it is also emblematically the richest feature of the building. It depicts Queen Victoria seated on her raised throne with a lion at her feet, crowned and holding a sceptre. She is supported on each side by classically draped figures representing England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, each bearing the national coat of arms and wearing a wreath of honour. The sides are then filled with figures representing the British colonial possessions, the 'oriental' on the right and 'occidental' on the left, paying homage and bringing presents and products. Every detail of the image is designed to show Victoria's authority over her Empire. The seated figure is the definitive symbol of authority. This is ordained by Ripa's *Iconologie* (see Fig. 2) where he elaborates '*les Juges, qui ont puissance d'absoudre & de*

[18] *Ibid*.
[19] W. Young, quoted in C. Foreman, 'The City Chambers: George Square', in her *Hidden Glasgow* (Edinburgh, 2001), 2.

*condamner, ne le peuvent faire selon les loix, s'ils ne sont assis*',[20] ('judges, who have the power to pardon and to condemn, cannot do this according to the laws, if they are not seated'). Added to this definitive symbol is the equally long-established symbolism of the crown and sceptre (which also features in Ripa's icon of authority). Interestingly, the main difference between Ripa's image of authority and the image of Victoria – other than the understandable absence of partial nudity of the subject – is the absence of religious imagery. Ripa's figure holds up keys '*pour nous apprendre, comme dit S. Paul,* Que toute puissance vient de Dieu'[21] ('to teach us, as St Paul said, *that all power comes from God*') and has books at her feet, '*un signe expres de l'Authorité des Escrittures*'[22] ('an express sign of the Authority of the Scriptures'). Victoria, in contrast, has a lion at her feet. This image makes for an interesting comparison with Alciato's emblem '*Amour affection trespuissante*' ('Love, the all-powerful emotion' (see Fig. 3)) which depicts the all-powerful Cupid taming the lions. The final lines of the emblem's *subscriptio* ask:

> Car s'il est puissant pour ces bestes,
> Pensez vous que nous en allions,
> Sans qu'il nous lie coeurs & testes?
>
> (For if he holds power over these beasts,
> Do you think that we could go along,
> Without him linking our heads and hearts?[23])

The taming of the lion is a vivid symbol of power over a great beast. In the pediment image it is Victoria who holds this same inescapable omnipotence as Cupid in the emblem. Even the geometry of the pediment reinforces the structure of authority in the Empire. The triangular shape in itself evokes hierarchy, with the individual Victoria at the apex, the four nations her closest level of support, and the numerous colonies subordinate, who present the products of their labour to their rightful owner. This imperialist, internationalist theme is embodied in the very fabric of the building, its interior an opulent exposition of the finest materials from around the world: the staircase is of Tuscan marble, the Council Chamber is of Spanish mahogany, and the Salon of Australian Satinwood.

It is fascinating to note that this image was not the initial plan for the pediment, which was originally designed to depict a symbolic figure of Glasgow, with 'the Clyde at her feet

[20] C. Ripa, *Iconologie, ou, Explication nouvelle de plusieurs images, emblemes, et autres figures: tirée des recherches & des figures de Cesar Ripa; desseignées & gravées par Jacques de Bie, et moralisées par J. Baudoin* (Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1636), 32.
[21] *Ibid.*, 33.
[22] *Ibid*.
[23] Translated more literally from the original Latin as 'Would one who has the power to conquer such a beast keep his hands from us?'

sending her manufactures and her arts to all the world',[24] but this was reconsidered in light of the construction taking place in the year of the Queen's Jubilee. This change was proposed after construction had begun, and its significance is clear considering the added difficulty and cost of such an alteration. Perhaps the prime image being of gifts given to Victoria from the world, rather than from Glasgow to the world, is revelatory of Queen and country still being the prime value in Victorian Glasgow. Perhaps it was merely a desire to display the exotic figures of the colonial possessions or emphasise the internationality of the city rather than its own production. We cannot be sure of the reasons for the change in the pediment's design, but what we can be sure of is the prime importance of its emblematic message. The power of the emblematic voice was clearly well understood by those charged with the building's design, and it was decided that the more appropriate story to be told was one which ultimately emphasised the power of the monarch over the power of the city workers – a crucial decision which reflects the values and power structures of the time.

Let us return to the rest of the architecture of the building's exterior. Above the pediment stand the figures of 'Truth, holding up the light of liberty over the city, and in her train are two supporting figures of Riches and Honour'.[25] These seem to mark the guiding principles of the Empire. Continue the gaze upwards and one discovers the central tower, surmounted by a gilded copper filial composed of an orb, a cross and a weather vane. The tower is decorated with four figures representing the four seasons. These can be interpreted emblematically when their orientation is considered: Spring faces to 'the opening east', Summer to 'the sunny south', Autumn to 'the declining west' and Winter to 'the bleak north'.[26] We get a sense from this and the iconography of the filial that Glasgow – and by extension, Great Britain and its Empire – is at the centre of the world. The progress of "elsewhere" is being judged in relation to its golden example. This can be seen as another incident of the emblematic 'conversation' between the viewer's knowledge and the emblem's allusions. This process has been cleverly manipulated to lead the viewer to discover a certain ideology which reinforces Glasgow's power as a city in the world.

Having studied the emblematic projection of the power of Victoria and the Empire, a further aspect of interest is the stories told of Glasgow itself. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a building intended to represent the city, the Glasgow coat of arms features heavily in both its exterior and interior. The most interesting example is its incorporation into an elaborate emblematic frieze above the main entrance archways on the George Square façade. The coat of arms, in itself an emblem combining allusions to the miracles of St Mungo, Glasgow's patron saint,

[24] W. Young, quoted in R. McKenzie, 'Public Sculpture of Glasgow', 156.
[25] *Ibid*., 157.
[26] North British Daily Mail (3/07/1889), quoted in R. McKenzie, 'Public Sculpture of Glasgow', 157.

and bearing the motto 'Let Glasgow flourish' is at the centre of the central panel above the principle entrance archway (see Fig. 4). It is flanked by reclining female figures, winged and classically draped, one bearing a trumpet and the other a palm leaf, to symbolise glory and victory. These are accompanied by further classical personifications of the virtues of hope, faith, truth and charity (holding an anchor, a crucifix, a mirror and a crowned heart respectively). The panel above the left archway contains male figures representing various areas of scientific knowledge; for example, a telescope for astronomy, and a globe for geology (see Fig. 5). This is complemented on the right by male figures representing various areas of artistic knowledge: sculpture, as knowledge of forms; painting, as knowledge of colour; etcetera. (see Fig. 6). This identification of particular symbols with the various virtues and areas of academic knowledge represents the first stage of Russell's 'emblematic process': the fragmentation of known symbols and allusions. The second stage consists of their recombination and subsequent re-interpretation into new significations in accordance with a text. Here, the text is not explicit, but rather alluded to in the safe knowledge of its understanding given the place specificity of the architectural emblem. The text is the extended version of the Glasgow motto. Young describes the figures as 'all bringing their respective knowledge to support the central motto, "Let Glasgow flourish". Religion, Virtue and Knowledge – may be taken to embody the missing half of the motto, "by the preaching of the word"'.[27] This follows Loach's theory on the importance of spatiality and place in architectural emblems. The emblematic frieze is created to be understood especially by those who have a pre-existing knowledge of Glasgow's local texts – it is an emblematic voice with a Glaswegian accent.

Thus it can be concluded that Glasgow City Chambers operates in a distinctly emblematic way to project a Victorian ideology, which emphasises Queen, country and Empire, as well as championing the values of knowledge, trade and industry that had brought Glasgow to the fore at that moment in history. We have seen how, following Russell, this impact was achieved through the fragmentation and recombination of various sign systems, both classical-historical and local-contemporary. We have also seen how, following Loach, the function of the architectural emblematics is best understood through the conceptual reconstruction of the environment and its place in space and time. The presence of this extensive use of architectural emblematics can be seen to reflect the Victorian revival of emblem books and indeed a cultural shift back towards mysticism, and symbolism, after the rationalism and empiricism that dominated the eighteenth century. Thus, the powerful emblematic images have 'spoken' to us, providing the key to unlock the cultural and political history preserved in the bricks and mortar of our public buildings. Historical figures may have

[27] W. Young, quoted in R. McKenzie, 'Public Sculpture of Glasgow', 153.

been set in stone, no longer showcased by accompanying ceremonies, but to the attentive passer-by, their voices have not been silenced.

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Fig. 3: 'Amour affection trespuissante', Andrea Alciato, *Livret des emblemes* (Paris, 1536). By permisson of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections, via <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/emblem.php?id=FALa007> [6.6.12]

Fig. 4: City Chambers main entrance archway frieze, central panel. (Author's Photograph)

Fig. 5: City Chambers main entrance archway frieze, left side panel. (Author's Photograph)

Fig. 6: City Chambers main entrance archway frieze, right side pane. (Author's Photograph)

# *Écriture féminine* and the female language of Lady Gaga

Adam Sorice

While Lady Gaga is often acknowledged for her outlandish visual style and elaborate performative identity, the lyricism of the popular singer-songwriter's music represents a similarly controversial ideology in linguistic terms. Reinterpreting the French feminist concept of *écriture féminine* or 'writing in the feminine',[1] this essay contextualises Gaga's music as demonstrative of an anarchic, female language that challenges both the phallogocentric constraints of linguistic expression and wider patriarchal culture. Gaga's utilisation of *écriture féminine* also expands the theoretical notion of revolutionary gendered language beyond the hypothetical constraints of literary theory and into public, popular discourse, granting a real-world viability and practicality to the term. This essay distinguishes itself as one of the first (if not the first) literary academic studies of Lady Gaga's music, positioning her work within a feminist understanding of anarchic gender expression and cultural change through the use of chaotic linguistic forms.

Developed by feminist writer Hélène Cixous and outlined in her 1975 essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa', the literary concept of *écriture féminine* represents both a creative exploration of female identity and a resistance against patriarchal forms of self-expression. The term, described by Martin Gray as a form of writing 'in which the sexual, psychic and physical identity of the female gender is given a voice',[2] represents a conceptual form of the female voice which seeks to subvert the intellectual and emotional boundaries of gender-biased language, understood by French feminist theory as being oppressive to the capabilities of feminine expression.

Despite often being viewed as a predominantly theoretical or even idealistic concept,[3] *écriture féminine* has the capability to affect tangible cultural change through real world applications. This essay will identify the expressive limitations of patriarchal language and discuss the ways in which Cixous' *écriture féminine* claims to counteract them. It will then offer a close-reading of the work of popular singer-songwriter Lady Gaga under these principles to support the argument for the definitive power of *écriture féminine* as a form of feminist expression.

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[1] A. Bray, *Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference* (Basingstoke, 2004), 3.
[2] M. Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms: Second Edition* (Harlow, 1992), 97.
[3] A. R. Jones, 'Writing the body: Towards an understanding of l'écriture féminine' (1981) in J. Newton and D. Rosenfelt (eds.), *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture* (London, 1985), 91.

Cixous' central argument behind the necessity of *écriture féminine* is that language is not only constricted by a series of principles controlled by men but that these principles have also actively sought to curtail female cultural expression. Contextualising the female act of writing as 'taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus',[4] Cixous interprets pre-existing language under a Lacanian ideology of patriarchal dominance via the symbolic order, a philosophical framework of understanding that denies women a voice of their own.[5]

This male domination of language, Ann Jones argues, 'is another means through which man objectifies the world, reduces it to his terms, speaks in place of everything and everyone else – including women'.[6] Patriarchal discourse not only restricts linguistic diversity but actively misrepresents social and cultural constructs and reinterprets them within its own ideology, specifically in the case of women and female identity. Cixous' *écriture féminine* seeks to develop a representative language of expression through which women can not only share their views but challenge the supremacy of patriarchal language and the cultural contexts it claims as its own.

This marginalised nature of *écriture féminine*, illustrative of women's cultural subjugation in the patriarchal interpretation of society, is integral to the form's pluralistic relationship with dominant discourses. It seeks to create a multiplicity of languages rather than attempting to attain expressive dominance; rejecting the very linguistic oppression it is subject to. Susan Sellers argues, 'since a feminine subject position refuses to appropriate or annihilate the other's difference in order to construct the self in a (masculine) position of mastery, Cixous suggests that a feminine writing will bring into existence alternative forms of relation, perception and expression'.[7] *Écriture feminine* has creative possibilities through the broadening of creative forms of expression for both men and women and expanding available creative discourses for all forms of cultural communication.

The very nature of this multiplicity gives women's writing the opportunity to contrast the logocentric nature of patriarchal language by revelling in an evasion of semiological scrutiny. Outlining the concept's principles, Cixous argues that *écriture féminine* 'can never be theorized, enclosed, coded',[8] adopting the feminine mystique 'discovered' by psychoanalysts

[4] H. Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975) trans. K. Cohen and P. Cohen in V.B. Leitch *et al*. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism: Second Edition* (London, 2010), 1947.
[5] R. Appignanesi *et al*., *Postmodernism for Beginners* (Cambridge, 1995), 92-93.
[6] Jones, 'Writing the body', 87.
[7] S. Sellers, *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (London, 1994), xxix.
[8] Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 1949.

such as Freud and mapping it onto its own linguistic forms of ambiguous signification.[9] The aim of this systematic evasiveness is to conceptualise an 'impregnable language' for women, to take the power that patriarchal discourses have used to expel women and use it to create dynamic social and linguistic change via the destruction of 'classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes'.[10] This use of deconstructed language to, in turn, deconstruct culture itself is the ambition of *écriture féminine*, challenging mainstream patriarchal discourses and repurposing them as subversive feminist texts of agency.

This is the ideology of *écriture féminine*, but can concrete examples of the form be found in practice? Jones critiques the logistical issues of women's writing providing benefits beyond the individual due to the technical and hierarchical difficulties of publication and circulation.[11] This foreshadows similar concerns from Caitlin Moran regarding pro-feminist punk fanzines and their inaccessibility for oblivious teenage girls in the 1990s.[12] However, could pop music, one of the twenty-first century's most mainstream and pervasive forms of cultural expression, already have its own form of *écriture féminine*?

While it may receive little academic attention, popular music offers a uniquely insightful perspective into the artistic identity of its creators, as exemplified by John Steinbeck's belief that 'you can learn more about people by listening to their songs than any other way'.[13] Pop music's revelatory abilities appear to have made it the ideal method of expression for female artists, who enjoy a commercial dominance over men unparalleled in the fields of literature, art and film. These artists have taken the form's confessional nature and transformed it into a culture of scandalous gender revelations and empowering anthems, spanning a pro-feminist spectrum from Aretha Franklin's 'Respect' to Beyoncé's 'Single Ladies'.

Further developing the idea of pop music as a gender-expressive narrative, Susan Butruille argues that the process of feminine music is innately anti-patriarchal in its evasion of tangible certainty, noting that 'when women have sung about the truths in their own lives, they have conveyed no definite images of themselves. Rather, they have sung about events and feelings that were important to them'.[14] The textual instability created by women within music appears to carry many of the hallmarks of the semiologically unstable *écriture feminine*. This signals

[9] V. B. Leitch *et al*. (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism: Second Edition* (London, 2010), 1944, n.4.
[10] Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 1952.
[11] Jones, 'Writing the body', 97.
[12] C. Moran, *How to be a Woman* (London, 2011), 140-141.
[13] J. Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest* (New York, 1970), vii.
[14] S. G. Butruille *et al*., 'Women in American Popular Song', in L. P. Stewart and S. Ting-Toomey (eds.), *Communication, Gender and Sex Roles in Diverse Interaction Contexts* (New Jersey, 1987), 183.

the possibility of a uniquely female language within pop music, free of the phallogocentrist restrictions of the gendered voice and representing a powerful cultural form through which the diversity of feminine experience in new linguistic directions can be explored.

Mirroring this proliferation of uniquely female forms of expression within popular culture, *The New York Times* has celebrated Lady Gaga, the globally successful singer-songwriter, for her expansion of the scope of creative identity within recent pop music.[15] Feminist writers such as J. Jack Halberstam and Caitlin Moran have also celebrated her cultural impact, noting that Gaga represents 'a loud voice for different arrangements of gender, sexuality, visibility and desire'[16] and that 'as a cultural icon, she does an incredible service for woman: after all, it will be hard to oppress a generation who've been brought up on pop stars with fire coming out of their tits'.[17] If Gaga's cultural influence has opened up new creative possibilities within both the realm of pop music identity and feminist empowerment, perhaps her music could offer similar potential to the development of the 'impregnable' female language envisioned by Cixous.

Cixous' vision for a rebellious and passionate female voice to develop from *écriture féminine* shares many similarities with Lady Gaga's work, particularly in her aggressively deconstructive theories of language development. Motioning for a female linguistic emancipation, Cixous writes:

> If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man […] it is time for her to dislocate this "within", to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.[18]

Within this impassioned manifesto we can note both an active reclaiming of patriarchal-controlled discourses, represented in the metaphor of the tongue, and their violent deconstruction into methods of feminine expression. Simultaneously there is a very palpable sexual element to Cixous' writing, the liberation of the female identity and the fulfilling of its sexual appetite through violent physical interaction. The creation of this new, potently feminine language appears to prioritise sexual conflict and raw expression over the restrictive and uniform male language that this new form of communication has 'exploded' free from.
Many of these themes of anarchic language development can be found in Gaga's early work and specifically her breakout hit 'Poker Face'. The song, which achieved worldwide success,

[15] J. Caramanica, 'Girl Pop's Lady Gaga Makeover' (2010) in *The New York Times*, 21 July.
[16] J. Jack, Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston, 2012), xii.
[17] C. Moran, 'Come Party with Gaga' in *Moranthology* (London, 2012), 118.
[18] Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 1953.

not only considers issues of gender miscommunication but also deconstructs conventional language in order to emphasise the song's rebellious themes. These ideas manifest most clearly in the chorus:

> Can't read my, can't read my
> No he can't read my poker face
> (She has got me like nobody)
>
> P-P-P-Poker face, P-P-Poker Face [19]

Not only does 'Poker Face' depict a narrative of female communicative superiority (Gaga is depicted as maintaining a dominance of power over her male lover through her construction of an impenetrable emotional facade), but it also seeks to celebrate an alternative form of expression in its prioritisation of charade over certainty in a discourse of gendered elusiveness. The linguistic dominance of Gaga's Machiavellian persona is expressed in the male voice's subservient echo, admitting her allure. It is also expressed through the alliterative 'P-P-P-Poker Face', a deconstructive interpretation repurposing conventionally male discourses and playfully reconstructing the words into a language of female autonomy. The repetitious, stuttering dimension of the phrase not only fulfils Cixous' designs of a female language that 'sweeps away syntax' [20] but simultaneously creates an effect of multiplicity; innumerable Gagas speak together in feminist unity. Furthermore, the singer's shuddering syllables evoke an empowered female volatility, developing notions of vocal or mental instability.

The deconstruction of conventional language into anarchic feminine forms is a key textual effect across much of Gaga's work. For example, Gaga's writing frequently features the use of the singer's own name as an identifying linguistic signifier, first featuring in 'Eh, Eh (Nothing Else I Can Say)' as the deconstructed form, 'Gaah, Gaah'.[21] By positioning her own deconstructed persona within the text, Gaga simultaneously becomes part of the feminine language she uses and actively destabilises surrounding language in similarly destructive ways, rendering her identity as deconstructionist agency within this chaotic form of language. The musical phrase has since gone on to feature in many of Gaga's key works but its most iconic usage is undoubtedly within the introduction of 'Bad Romance', the lead single from her EP *The Fame Monster*:

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[19] Lady Gaga, 'Poker Face', Track 4 from *The Fame*, written by S. Germanotta and N. Khayat, produced by N. Khayat, (California, 2008), 1.04-1.16.
[20] Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 1952.
[21] Lady Gaga, 'Eh, Eh (Nothing Else I Can Say)', Track 5, from *The Fame*, written by S. Germanotta and M. Kierszenbaum, produced by M. Kierszenbaum, (California, 2008), 0.09-0.11.

Rah, Rah, Ah, Ah Ahh
Roma, Roma, Ma
Ga Ga, Oh La Laa
Want your bad romance [22]

The extension of Gaga's deconstruction of language within 'Bad Romance' sees conventional vocabulary teased apart by the emotional impulses of the song's love affair and reborn as an aggressive, animalistic snarl of desire. The word choice in particular is key: Gaga's reimagining of the word 'romance' as a quintessentially "monstrous" term reflects the destructive nature of heterosexual desire, a desire that can tear apart an individual in a similar fashion as Gaga has deconstructed patriarchal language and its autonomous cultural power over women.

The patriarchal nature of romance is a key concern for Gaga, contextualised within the song 'Scheiße' as 'love is objectified by what men say is right'. [23] This evocative reinterpretation of the term not only creates a discourse of volatile female expression but positions it as a creative force; Gaga's female language has the ability to refashion what has been destroyed by male aggression in new, subversive forms. This creative element becomes a core theme of the song. Gaga yearns in the chorus 'I want your love and I want your revenge / You and me could write a bad romance.' [24] By turning the jealousy and passion of her lover into a compelling narrative, Gaga positions the modern female voice as productive of Sellers' 'alternative forms of relation, perception and expression' [25], deriving new forms of gender narrative from conventional patriarchal social narratives.

Gaga's realisation of the chaotic elements of anti-patriarchal language comes to the fore in 'Scheiße', a linguistically disordered feminist club anthem. The song begins with Gaga asserting, 'I don't speak German but I can if you like…' [26] This compromising statement has insinuations of wishing to conform to patriarchal linguistic dominance and female subservience. However, Gaga inverts the sentiment of her declaration by juxtaposing it with an animalistic scream of emancipation before proceeding to rap in a faux-German nonsense language. She transforms her surrender to the patriarchal command of language into an impassioned rebellion against linguistic control:

[22] Lady Gaga, 'Bad Romance', Track 1 from *The Fame Monster*, written by S. Germanotta and N. Khayat, produced by N. Khayat, co-produced by S. Germanotta, (California, 2009), 0.17-0.25.
[23] Lady Gaga, 'Scheiße', Track 7, from *Born This Way*, written and produced by S. Germanotta and N. Khayat, (California, 2011), 1.53-1.57.
[24] Lady Gaga, 'Bad Romance', 1.13-1.20.
[25] Sewers, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, xxix.
[26] Lady Gaga, 'Scheiße', 0.00-0.03.

Ich schleiban austa be clair
es kumpent madre monstère,
aus-be aus-can-be flaugen
begun be üske but-bair

Ich schleiban austa be clair
es kumpent ouste monstère
aus-be aus-can flaugen
fräulein uske-be clair [27]

While Gaga's language does initially appear to mimic German to the uninitiated speaker, the song's true chaotic nature seeks to challenge conventional language with its jarring, alien nature and baffling lexicon. Gaga's contextualisation of the verses as German, however dubious such a claim may be, positions them as of a language with real world relationality. It also implies that this language is the product of a radical *écriture féminine* deconstruction of patriarchal linguistic form. Gaga's unique language represents the counter-cultural outcome of a reinterpretation of mainstream discourses. Abandoning the very 'reason' that has blighted language, according to Cixous, 'Scheiße' is a text that finds significance within epistemological impenetrability.

However, despite its relatively meaningless and anti-contextual content, the avant-garde language does maintain tenuous connections to phallogocentric discourses. A balance can be found between anarchic feminine expression and meaningful semiological relevance. Gaga achieves this through the inclusion of reimagined foreign vocabulary within her specifically female discourse. She weaves her own identity into the text once again with the phrase 'Madre monstère', a linguistic corruption of her moniker amongst fans. Gaga's "Mother Monster" sobriquet intriguingly contextualises the feminist linguistic aims of 'Scheiße', mirroring Cixous' violent destruction of patriarchal discourses and their empowered reimagining as a uniquely female language. It appears to represent both the maternally creative and aggressively destructive dimensions of femininity.

Progressing into a more conventional style of language, 'Scheiße' proceeds to chart the narrative of the feminine courtship and feminist rejection of male dominance. Gaga first attempts to acquire the acceptance of patriarchy by promising 'I'll take you out tonight, do whatever you like / Scheiße be mine'[28], before demanding her emotional autonomy in the chorus as she yearns 'I wish I could be strong without the Scheiße, yeah.' [29] This contextualisation of male control, as both literally 'shit' and belonging to the German

[27] *Ibid.*, 0.03-0.18. (Translation replicated from album booklet.)
[28] *Ibid.*, 0.47-0.53.
[29] *Ibid.*, 1.21-1.25.

discourse Gaga has already parodied in feminist revolt, develops a relational validity between Gaga's search for a feminine language of expression and her desire to be free from the social and sexual tyranny imposed by patriarchal structures.

The song's second verse represents Gaga's acquisition of a feminine intellectual autonomy as she encourages other women to find empowerment through their physical femininity, urging them to 'express your woman kind, fight for your rights'.[30] The celebration of feminist liberation and feminine identity through both language and body reaches its climax at the pre-chorus. Gaga overthrows patriarchal dominance in her declaration that 'if you're a strong female, you don't need permission'.[31] The independent woman who is able to eschew patriarchal social convention and exist within her own principles through a reacquisition of female autonomy appears to embody the revolutionary ambitions of Cixous' *écriture feminine*. She represents both a universality and positivity to feminist emancipation that offers meaningful change through a deconstructionist reinterpretation of patriarchal dominance. Gaga once again relates this cultural shift of female identity back to language, arguing in 'Judas':

> In the most biblical sense,
> I am beyond repentance
> Fame, hooker, prostitute,
> Wench vomits her mind
> But in the cultural sense,
> I just speak in future tense
> Judas kiss me if offenced
> *Or wear ear condoms next time* [32]

Gaga contextualises her modern female voice as representative of a burgeoning feminist emancipation, confirming her uniquely female language and the essence of *écriture féminine* as crucial elements in the future of female identity. Equally, she acknowledges its incompatibility with both historical and contemporary patriarchal structures, citing its opposition to the misogynistic discourse of Christianity and its attempts to discredit the authority of female voices within society. Finally, Gaga inverts the sovereignty of male sexual desire by encouraging Judas to appreciate her physical sexuality if he disagrees with her ideas. She suggests he wear 'ear condoms' if he does not wish to hear her language. Gaga's utilisation of sexual pragmatics once again draws into question the relationship between female language and feminine sexuality. The request to use sexual protection

[30] *Ibid.*, 2.04-2.09.
[31] *Ibid.*, 2.12-2.16.
[32] Lady Gaga, 'Judas', Track 4, from *Born This Way*, written and produced by S. Germanotta and N. Khayat, (California, 2011), 2.55-3.10.

typically used to avoid pregnancy or contamination implies that there is both a virulent and productive dimension to female language. Just as Cixous argued, 'her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible',[33] Gaga's feminine discourse holds the potential not only to revolutionise female identity within its own personal application but to impregnate or infect others with its revelatory nature, forcing Judas into retreat as he recoils from Gaga's culturally polemical *écriture féminine*.

Gaga's rebellious, sexually forceful female language employs many of the ideological principles outlined by Cixous in her envisioning of a uniquely feminine discourse: *écriture féminine*. Through its aggressive deconstruction of patriarchal discourses and questioning of male cultural dominance, Gaga's music seeks to develop a new language of feminist emancipation, identity expression and cultural change through the use of chaotic linguistic forms. The real-world benefits of such experimentation appear obvious due to Gaga's continued commercial and cultural success, allowing her to continue to produce work within a uniquely female language that aims to 'establish a point of view […] from which phallogocentric concepts and controls can be seen through and taken apart, not only in theory, but also in practice.'[34] The social and cultural destabilisation represented by *écriture féminine* has always been possible, it has simply required access to the appropriate mainstream discourse, such as pop music, to actively deconstruct it and reimagine within its radical feminist image. Luckily, *écriture féminine* appears to have found a woman gaga enough to try.

[33] H. Cixous, quoted in Jones, 'Writing the body', 90.
[34] *Ibid.,*87.

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# No laughing matter: towards an unrestrained comic discourse

Daniel Thornton

Comedy, as a discourse, is often the object of censorship and moral outrage, both of which are misguided. Here, it is argued both that censorship of any discourse is to be avoided, as it can serve no progressive purpose, and that moral outrage directed at comedy fundamentally misunderstands its nature, as it serves as a cathartic, vaccinating discourse that allows us greater understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live.

Comedy, as a discourse, provides for a catharsis otherwise increasingly inaccessible to the modern subject. It has, through the exercise of the right to free expression, the potential to democratize and demystify public discourse. A discourse, as here discussed, is a way of talking (thinking) and thus, if the reader allows the assumption of a particular subjectivism, a way of describing, defining, reality. Thus, discourse represents not just a means by which power may be exercised and projected, but the union of voice and power; the space in which voice and power define each other. Discourses may be considered to have, for the purposes of discussion, something of a simple, non-technical, but still broadly Foucauldian definition, as summarised by Iara Lessa as 'systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.'[1]

Increasingly, there is a tendency, especially in the United Kingdom, towards the social and juridical censorship of discourses, which is nothing more than the evolution of a particular brand of paternalism in our media, in our politics and, worse, in our collective private conduct. Although the utility and necessity of free expression is, nominally, almost universally recognised in the West as a truth that need no longer permit any challenge, so thoroughly entrenched in our legal doctrine and cultural *doxa* that it transcends repeal or reproach, its erosion remains an issue in point. However, despite its conceptual incorporation into conventional political discourse, into our socio-national metaphorical frame of reference, there remains both an unwillingness to allow truly free speech and a great difficulty in its reconciliation with the other rights we now see fit to bestow**.** Censorship of any form represents an enforced voicelessness; the censor necessarily delineates the boundaries of our discourse, places undesirable ideas and concepts outwith the sphere of our intellectual perception, essentially writing them out of existence, reshaping our reality, removing the very

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[1] I. Lessa, 'Discursive Struggles within Social Welfare: Restaging Teen Motherhood', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 36 (2006), 285.

terms in which dissent is to be framed. Thus, if the boundaries of discourse are controlled by ideologically circumscribed arbiters of taste and morality, then, through this regulation and direction of the flow of knowledges, power is exerted to prevent true freedom of discourse, despite our apparently fundamental right to free expression.

Ironically, the most intellectually offensive among the dubious rights that emerge from the tangle of "common decency" and apparently humanitarian legislation is the right to be free from offence. This perceived right pervades public discourse, but is nowhere more damaging than in the public treatment of, and reaction to, comedy. Comic coverage of serious topics (national tragedies, disability, *et cetera*) courts controversy, often being construed as an attack on the vulnerable. This view, born of a certain pseudo-altruism, betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of comedy, assuming an irreverent and wilful blindness to the humanity of the issue. It conflates the ability to find humour in a situation with the inability to take it seriously, when, in fact, it serves a purpose exactly opposed, as discussed below.

Milton's *Areopagitica* foreshadowed an argument later made more fully by John Stuart Mill in his recognition of freedom of expression as *the* fundamental freedom: '[g]ive me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.'[2]

Mill later laid out perhaps the most persuasively thorough defence of freedom in *On Liberty*, an essay that now forms an integral part of the liberal politico-philosophical canon. Mill's essay not only recognises and defends the central importance of freedom of expression as underpinning all other forms of freedom, but goes further to say that freedom of expression is a necessary condition of both progress and understanding:

> [E]ven if the received opinion be not only true, but the whole truth; unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but […] the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost, or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on the character and conduct: the dogma becoming a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground, and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience.[3]

Both of these bear a particular relevance to comedy. The former, in that it is through comedy that we are perhaps best able to challenge the apparently fundamental moral and philosophical precepts of our society, and the latter in that comedy, through the challenge just

[2] J. Milton, *Areopagitica* (Oxford, 1954), 50.
[3] J.S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford, 2008), 59.

mentioned, humanises and democratizes the lofty and the highbrow, allowing moral ideals to be lived for, in the manner of personal principles, rather than lived by, in the manner of laws handed down from on high. Through this democratization of expression comes a more conceptually complete democratization: the downward redistribution and decentralisation of power. By equalising access to the means by which one can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of public discourse, the power by which the terms of public discourse are defined is diffused**.**

While journalistic objection to offensive comedy may seem in itself an exercise of free expression, such an interpretation naively fails to account for the power relations at play. While a free press is itself entirely laudable, one must bear in mind how public discourse is generated. When the power of the media is overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of the few, this infringes on, rather than facilitates free expression: when allowed to stamp out (the) competition, media corporations approach practical statehood. Thus, the concerted efforts of the private media to enflame the public against the comic is to be regarded in much the same light as governmental attempts to stifle free speech through policy, as they are alike in two key respects: they represent an attempt to direct and manipulate (rather than contribute to) the public dialectic according to a particular interest, and they involve the action of a greatly powerful institution against each member of the public as an individual.

The discussion of the unwarranted suppression of the comic may now, after being set in context, be subjected to a more systematic approach. Firstly, a distinction must be drawn between two kinds of discourse: explanatory and exploratory. An explanatory discourse seeks to provide answers, to explain the world and our place in it. It operates as a meta-narrative, an overarching and comprehensive map of existence which is, essentially, one's conceptual territory. It is through discourses that we experience reality, and it is thus arguably only "within" discourses that we ourselves can be said to exist. Examples of such include religion, science and the general philosophical codes by which we live, though the type could extend to any value-positing, constructive system.

It is important to note that it is not being suggested that anyone operates solely within a single discourse. Indeed, the opposite; the discourse within which one operates is not only often highly context-specific, but one's operative discourse is always a synthesis of many discourses, as in the case of many Western citizens: while they adhere to religious values in their (inter)personal conduct, they trust in science as far as matters of microwaves and motorcars are concerned.

An exploratory discourse functions as a scrutinative mechanism, allowing for, unsurprisingly, the exploration or dissection of explanatory discourses. Whereas explanatory discourse provides an overarching meta-narrative of thought, an exploratory discourse is a meta-discourse with the capacity for the historical, even archaeological, analysis of systems of thought, in that it is a field of discourse that seeks to relate to other discourses from without; exploratory discourse is the self-conscious, meta-cognitive component of our explanatory enterprise. Comedy, the primary contemporary vehicle of popular social commentary, is an example of an exploratory meta-discourse, providing for an unrestrained dialectic, through which to democratize the critical and explanatory elements of philosophy.

Exemplification is perhaps necessary to understand comedy as an exploratory discourse. Comedy, as a discourse, allows for the discussion of, and thus the coming to terms with, serious issues without the heaviness of heart associated with serious and austere philosophical discussion. Comedy facilitates the conversion of the undesirable into the desirable without intrinsic alteration. The average-man-on-any-given-day is decidedly not open to an in-depth philosophical and moral examination of the allegedly institutionalised paedophilia of the Church, but may be more open to a joke on the subject. Through the joke, the issue is raised, his conscience is aroused, he is made more consciously aware of the issue and, even if briefly, he considers it, but is not forced into uncomfortable debate or the self-conscious defence of his own position. He is shielded from all inconveniences and circumvents all the barriers of, and to, philosophical inquiry. The issue is raised, the moral matters are there to be considered, but there is none of the danger entailed by putting one's self "out there". No emotional investment need be made, and thus none can be lost; no opinion need be advanced and thus there is no fear of humiliation, attack or rejection. The existential angst and uncertainty is somewhat sterilised. Comedy also allows for a more objective analysis of events. By de-contextualising socially-drawn conclusions, removing them from a prescriptive paradigm within which they make sense by definition, and placing them within a differently biased, if not unbiased, paradigm, the absurdity of such conclusions becomes far more obvious. This idea will be discussed further below, in relation to the ontic-epistemic theory[4] of humour.

To further exemplify, "racist" humour, that is, humour that plays on racial stereotypes or parodies racist views, allows the subject to reconcile themselves with the "other" that they are confronted by in the form of other races. Despite years of political correctness and racial egalitarian policy and education, there is still an obvious, though superficial, difference between a black person and a white person; one is black, and the other white. No matter how

[4] See P. Marteinson, *The Origins of Laughter* (Kingston, 2005)

enlightened or modern the subject, they are still aware of this distinction, whether they will make it aloud or not. Indeed, the evasion of this distinction, the suppression of its knowledge in submission to social pressure, has the potential to result in tension and, worse, it could encourage the internalisation and intensification of regressive, racist sentiments. Through comedy, subjects can explore the differences – perceived, projected and performative – between races with far less fear of reprisal. Allowing for this kind of free exploration, rather than the timid substitute political correctness allows for, is far more conducive to the realisation of the truth of the assertion that, ultimately, we are all human, or any of a thousand other worthy conclusions; conclusions so often reduced, by elevation beyond questioning, in the manner described above by Mill, to nothing more than incidentally progressive platitudes.

Of course, there is the fear that allowing such discourse may recultivate or legitimise preconceived racist *doxa*. This is a misguided fear, and the suppression of discourse on such grounds is fraught with contradiction. How is it possible to move towards a society unshackled by the regressive construct of race by furthering that same construct, by extending the edifice of racial realism? By granting socio-legal protections on the basis of race, rather than an undifferentiated humanity, one only legitimises the concept of race. A post-racial society is not to be brought about through some dictatorship of the egalitariat, but through free discourse, the only reliable engine of progress and real social change.

To employ a medical metaphor, comedy is a vaccination. Through comedy, we may deal with the grave and the sombre without great heaviness of heart, because it is "only a joke", or we are "just kidding". Through jokes about starvation, murder, genocide and racism, we confront and, to an extent, resolve these issues without having to deal with them directly. Comedy is essentially a watered down form of these issues through which we deal with the issue proper; comedy provides a forum to explore taboos by proxy, that is, it opens up a philosophical arena in which we can tackle these modern maladies with recourse to moral direction through figurative indirection. Exposure to the weakened, comedic form of these cultural and philosophical problems is an existential vaccination against the actual issue. In light of this metaphor, it is then somewhat amusing that such jokes are often referred to as 'sick'. Now, if this is amusing, what issue does it deal with? What psycho-social ill does it remedy? This terminological amusement, this linguistic irony, acclimatises us to the uncertainty, and the subjectivity, of the fundamental underpinnings of our existence, and the loneliness of the same. We are alienated from each other on an individual level by the labels we apply as a society, by language. Language — that which does not merely have the greatest potential for bringing us together, but in fact provides for the possibility of social being at all — is driving us apart. If we are to think about this at all, without the joke we have no option other than to

recognise that the minds of others are configured differently, that they perceive the world differently and thus, arguably, inhabit a different world; that they are in fact *other*, and thus to recognise that we are all, in our subjective realities, completely alone. The fact that this situation is entirely constructed forms the basis of the ontic-epistemic theory of humour. Here, laughter stands as a coping mechanism, almost as an alternative to that melancholic conclusion in a manner best encapsulated in the writings of the comedian Frankie Boyle:

> I think you can choose to be amused by the hopelessness of the world. Laugh at every [...] crass, awful thing […]. [T]hey say you can't choose what happens, but you can choose how you react to it […]. You can choose to just laugh.[5]

Positing laughter, the product of comedy and comic discourse, as an expression of superiority has a long tradition. This fits our theory, in that the exploration of existential issues perhaps represents, in knowing them, a sort of victory over them; a pseudo-resolution that permits us to feel, if only briefly, that the problem is solved, that we have triumphed. In *Of the Essence of Laughter*, Baudelaire writes:

> Laughter, so they say, comes from superiority. I should not be surprised if, in face of this discovery, the physiologist himself were to burst out laughing at the thought of his own superiority. And so the way it should have been put is: Laughter comes from a man's idea of his own superiority.[6]

He then asserts that this amounts to hubris, a cardinal sin[7]. Perhaps he takes refuge in this deeply pessimistic and puritanical discourse because his refusal to acknowledge the worth of comedy left him unable to resolve the issues at the heart of his own existential angst without recourse to such bleak philosophies. However, this nexus of superiority that Baudelaire alludes to is perhaps the very ground on which the controversy of comedy lies. Those easily offended by controversial comedy tend to conflate the superiority of the comic over the philosophical issue with the superiority of the comic over the 'victims' of the issue. The joke is an aid to conceptual comprehension, thus contributing to a fuller, truer compassion, rather than an attack.

Philosophy was mentioned above as an alternative field of exploratory discourse. As a field of exploratory discourse, philosophy has several weaknesses, the three greatest of which are: its blurring of the distinction between exploratory and explanatory discourses (arguably to the

[5] F. Boyle, *Work! Consume! Die!* (London, 2011), 138.
[6] C. Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature* (London, 2006), 145.
[7] *Ibid*.

point of bias); its inaccessibility to the common man, and its counter-productively affected sombreness.

Philosophy, especially analytical philosophy, is only incidentally exploratory, in that the exploratory function is only the means to an end, as it is generally subordinated to the furtherance of its own explanatory discourse. Assumptions and dogmas are challenged, their weaknesses exposed, but in favour of a definite alternative. Thus, the primary distinction between comedy and philosophy is teleological: philosophy is ultimately positive, whereas comedy rarely ventures beyond implicit postulation.

While comedy is rarely without agenda, it is rarer still for it to be explicit in such; comedy is not a prescriptive discourse. Philosophy's exploratory scope is thus limited by a prescriptive tendency which, while not necessarily wrong in and of itself, is contrary to the purpose of an exploratory discourse and characteristic of an explanatory discourse. Comedy is far less susceptible to such weaknesses, by its non-positive and more intrinsically exploratory nature. Popular political discourse also suffers from the lack of a free exploratory function, as laymen are alienated to the extent that they dissent, primarily due to the political tendency to marginalise and often criminalise dissenters: one who struggles with the internalisation of the taboos surrounding race is racist, one who holds fast to the gender-roles they were raised to know is sexist, and one who struggles to accept a redefinition of marriage is homophobic. Rather than a dialectic process, it is a policy of exclusion and it is only through submission that one may achieve acceptance, a counter-productive conformity that can only breed resentment and, through this oppression, reinforce the proscribed view. Comedy, as a vaccinating alternative to philosophy, has the potential to neutralise this oppression, which is a necessary consequence of a proscription-permitting worldview; it gears our collective conscience to an unrestrained and free expression of ideas through discourse.

Prominent among the more general problems of philosophy is its inaccessibility. Whether this inaccessibility is due to the actual or perceived nature of philosophy, it exists, and there is an undeniable resultant failure on the part of the general populace to engage with the philosophical canon now so widely available. Whether the blame lies with the common man or can be shifted to one establishment or another is irrelevant; that this intellectual alienation is the case is all that matters. Public interest has waned to the extent that names such as Foucault and Stirner raise more eyebrows than responses. Outwith the ranks of the intelligentsia, the university-educated and the occasional autodidact, there is an astounding indifference to philosophy. Even within the just listed exceptions, anything approaching comprehensive, in-depth knowledge is rare. Thus, an opportunity both for self-knowledge and

for understanding and coming to terms with the nature and uncertainty of existence is missed. Unlike philosophy, there are no barriers between the masses and comedy, bar the tyranny of 'taste'. Comedy explores issues of great gravity at least as nimbly and finely as philosophy, without reliance on technicality or complex theoretical superstructures. Comedy therefore serves to democratise intellectual inquiry, which has the power to function as a coping mechanism. Already bearing, on a conscious level or not, the stress of both the micro-issues of their day-to-day lives and the macro-issues of their actual existence, modern subjects have relatively little time for the issues that fall in between, the human tragedies and moral quandaries that do not bear, in a major sense, directly on them, bar their media-facilitated knowledge of the issues. Further, the modern subject has far too little mental energy to devote to a personal resolution of the competing arguments, factors and interests at play; even the extent to which their psychic resilience is sufficient to cope with such comes increasingly under question, for the communalisation, the globalisation of misery that the modern media has brought about cannot be without consequence. Comedy effectively circumvents all of these issues.

Following from the latter point, perhaps most damning of all is philosophy's sheer sobriety, its sombreness. This criticism extends even to most non-technical serious discourse. Comedy is a serious discourse, but it is not grave. Nietzsche is one of a few exceptions, in that his is almost a comic philosophy. This is not to say that the subject matter is comical, or indeed that the conclusions reached are comical; rather, it is to say merely that there is a structural comedy of sorts. The defining characteristic of a 'comic philosophy' is a particular tension between what Nietzsche would call the Apollonian and the Dionysian.[8] In Nietzsche's writings, there is a stylistic decadence, a linguistic and expressive hedonism, a pervading sense of pleasure-taking that almost amounts to joyousness, despite the cynicism and darkness of his philosophy. The tension between these, the dour revelry of his writings, is relieved, in somewhat Freudian fashion, by the perception of a certain irony, a sardonic funniness that serves also to lighten the burden of freedom placed on the reader by his conclusions. His comedy-of-sorts is absent from philosophy in general, and this is undoubtedly one of the alienating factors at play.

In *The Origins of Laughter,* Peter Marteinson posits that the comic ensues from the sudden perception of the separateness, the alienation, of social reality; the virtual reality constructed by the factual status accorded to social constructs and beliefs, and physical reality. Marteinson argues that social and physical reality are blended in perception, creating the

[8] F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (London, 1993), 13.

illusion that they are equally real, and it is the realisation that this is not so that results in humour, a response that dispels the consequent epistemological uncertainty through the euphoria of laughter. He also posits that the funniest cultural concepts, those that 'provoke real laughter' are those pertaining to questions of identity:

> […] the social identities that we associate with individual persons; […] nationalities, social classes, occupations, kinships, friendships, professional relationships, enders and the like, [are] the primary fodder for the comical cannon, probably because the commonest and most important cultural concepts we mentally associate with social reality, in perception, are of this particular "size and shape".[9]

This theory runs parallel to the above characterisation of comedy as a de-contextualising discourse, in that it may be said to actively pursue the realisation of the fictitiousness of social reality. It also allows for the earlier characterisation of comedy as a coping mechanism, in that issues of identity pertain to one of the most pressing of the modern subject's existential concerns: who am I?

Thus, apparently offensive comedy is in fact the means by which laypersons come to know not only themselves, but others and the other. They are alienated from philosophical discourse by three main factors: its inaccessibility, its too-positive nature and its sombreness. To an extent, they are often excluded from the progressive national political discourse for exactly the reason they need it. The status quo, which denies freedom of expression to the dissenter, is brought about, shaped and directed by powers and forces beyond the subject's control. This structural alienation lends itself to the creation of a growing (disen)franchise of the powerless and the voiceless. Cathartically, comedy satisfies the needs that this creates, serving to prompt an introspective dialectic and resolve the psychic tensions resulting from the repression of socially unaccepted views, from a proscribed worldview, from a proscribed discourse. It is in the latter phrase that it becomes most painfully obvious that the censoring of comedic discourse, the modulation of comedy's inherently free voice, strays far from the realm of justified paternalism; a proscribed discourse is a banned way of thinking, a banned manner of construction, and proscription thus constitutes the creation of thoughtcrime, an unacceptable totalitarianism that cannot result in a free, fair and progressive society. Further, comedy requires special protection, above and beyond the strenuous measures that should be in place to protect all discourse, because it fulfils a deep and particular human need, the denial of which can only result in an existential crisis.

[9] P. Marteinson, *The Origins of Laughter* (Kingston, 2005), 12.

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# Puccini's *Tosca* as a representation of a freethinker's struggle against the corrupted power of the church

Veerle Verhagen

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), the famous Italian composer, has been described as a cynic towards the Catholic Church, despite having been brought up in arguably one of the most Catholic countries of Europe. The Church was equally mistrusting of him, especially after the first performances of *Tosca*, one of his most famous works. In this opera his antipathy towards the Catholic Church as an institution is expressed clearly through the narrative, where the struggle of the individual against the corrupted power of the Church is represented as a personal struggle between two individuals who represent the opposite sides of this conflict. However, a more interesting aspect is how Puccini has employed musical techniques to dramatise the power struggle and reflect the shifting of power from one character to the other.

The opera *Tosca*, written by Giacomo Puccini and first performed in 1900, depicts a fierce power struggle between two of the main characters: the eponymous heroine Floria Tosca, a famous singer, and her main antagonist, the cruel chief-of-police, Scarpia. This struggle can be perceived both through music and visual features. An important example of musical reinforcement of a character's dominance is the use of *leitmotifs*, recurring musical themes that are associated with certain characters that can be repeated to imply a character's influence as perceived by the characters on stage. The way singers use their voice is another clear way of expressing power or powerlessness in the opera. Visually, stage directions indicate the characters' position – both their literal position on stage, and their metaphorical position of power or powerlessness. Although some visual aspects, such as clothing, can vary from production to production, there are certain elements which recur in many stagings that are employed to show the viewer which character has more power. Throughout the opera, Scarpia is certainly portrayed as the dominant character. However, as the story develops, the power briefly seems to shift from Scarpia to Tosca, and then back again to Scarpia. Each character uses what power they have against the other, and although Scarpia generally has the upper hand, Tosca undeniably has some power over Scarpia and manages to use it to her own advantage.

The power struggle between the two characters can be seen as a personal battle between two individuals; more importantly, it represents an individual's struggle against the corrupted power of the Catholic Church, which was an even more powerful institute in the Italy of

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Puccini's days than it is now. Puccini was not a particularly religious man[1]. Although he had received the customary baptism and lived in a time and place where religion was an important part of daily life, he was not much of a believer for most of his adult life. Puccini had two friends in the clerical world and both priests described him as a cynic towards religion. The Church was equally hostile towards Puccini and considered him a dangerous heretic, even more so after *Tosca*, in which the composer made use of religious music, taking it out of its traditional, sacred environment[2]. The three main characters of the opera represent three different standpoints: Scarpia represents the Church and its willingness to do wrong in order to defend its own system; Tosca represents a victim of this system, who trusts the system completely; Cavaradossi, Tosca's lover, has distanced himself completely from the church and is considered an enemy of the system by its supporters, much like Puccini himself. The story is set in Rome and takes place in less than 24 hours on June 17th, 1800. Puccini chose this particular date in history because it was around this time that the battle of Marengo was being fought: Napoleon, considered by some a liberator of the common man who was to do away with the aristocratic, oppressive rule that had Italy in its grip, was about to claim victory[3]. The Church considered him a grave threat to their power, and it is no coincidence that Cavaradossi, the enemy of the Church in this story, supports him. The struggle between Tosca and Scarpia, on a narrative level, can be seen as a personal struggle between two people, but the deeper political meaning of their conflict – that of the conflict between Church and freethinkers – must not be overlooked.

From listening to the music and by looking at the score, we can infer much about the distribution of power in the story. The overwhelming power that Scarpia has over the other characters in the opera is immediately established through music in the first moments of the work. The opera opens with Scarpia's *motif*, an easily recognisable theme made up of 5 tones. The fact that the opera does not open with an overture or prelude, as is common, but with Scarpia's *leitmotif*, suggests much about him and his position. From the very first moments of the work, there is no escaping Scarpia. Additionally, the way his theme is played at the beginning (*fff tutta forza* – or as loud as possible) is significant. It is played loudly and harshly, as if to overwhelm and intimidate the audience from the beginning with Scarpia's power and his violent nature. The chords that form his *motif*, as Keeffe writes, 'are not just violent; they are harmonically unrelated, and so symbolise the irrational acts of a psychopath'. [4] The music itself, therefore, tells the listener something about Scarpia's

[1]J.L. DiGaetani, *Puccini the Thinker. The Composer's Intellectual and Dramatic Development* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 62.
[2]*Ibid*.
[3]*Ibid*., 64.
[4]B. Keeffe, 'The music of Puccini's "Tosca"', in (ed.) N. John, Tosca (London, 1982), 17.

character. Repetition is another means by which Scarpia's theme expresses the power he has over the other characters. The theme recurs throughout the opera, even when Scarpia himself is not present on stage. Much as the opening with his theme signals his omnipresent threat, whenever Scarpia's threat is perceived in particular by one of the characters on stage, or when his name is mentioned, we hear his *leitmotif*. For instance, in Act I, when Cavaradossi and his friend Angelotti, a political refugee, are discussing how the latter's sister helped him escape Scarpia's men, Angelotti sings 'Tutto ella ha osato // onde sottrarmi a Scarpia scellerato'[5] ('She has dared to do anything in order to keep me from the wicked Scarpia'[6]). At the exact moment that Angelotti starts pronouncing the name Scarpia, Scarpia's *motif* starts and it is stretched out over 'Scarpia scellerato' ('wicked Scarpia'). It is then repeated again and again as Cavaradossi speaks of Scarpia: it is repeated twice, but quietly, *pianissimo*, as he calls the chief-of-police 'Bigotto satiro' ('bigot satyr'), then again whilst Cavaradossi describes Scarpia's wicked deeds, and one last time, but powerfully, *fff*, as Cavaradossi says 'fa il confessore e il boia!'[7] ('he is both confessor and executioner'). Even when he is physically absent, therefore, Scarpia represents a threat, and it is clearly a formidable one as it is constantly emphasised by the repetition of his theme. The fact that his theme recurs throughout the opera so frequently and is even heard after the death of his character reflects that his power over the other characters is considerable.

However, it is not necessarily Scarpia as an individual that poses a threat, it is what he represents: the corrupt power of an extremely influential institution. In the scene mentioned above, Cavaradossi alludes to the corrupt power of the Church and the clergy. When Tosca is about to enter the church, Cavaradossi tells Angelotti to hide: 'E` buona la mia Tosca, ma credente // al confessor nulla tien celato // ond'io mi tacqui. E` cosa più prudente.'[8] ('My Tosca is a good person, but she is religious. She keeps nothing from her confessor. That is why I said nothing – it is more prudent.') To Cavaradossi this faith in clergy is foolish, as he knows that the privacy and secrecy of the confessional are held less sacred by this Church than the defence of its own power[9]. Puccini expresses his own cynicism towards the Church repeatedly throughout *Tosca*, generally, as here, through the character of Cavaradossi, who is, not unlike the composer himself, a freethinker who mistrusts the Church.

[5]G. Giacosa and L. Illica, *Tosca*. Composed by Giacomo Puccini. Published by English National Opera Guides (London, 1982), 44.
[6]This and all subsequent translations are by the author.
[7]Giacosa & Illica, *Tosca*, 44.
[8]*Ibid*., 43.
[9]DiGaetani, *Puccini the Thinker. The Composer's Intellectual and Dramatic Development*, 65.

When Scarpia himself finally enters the stage, he is accompanied musically, as is to be expected, by his own *motif*[10], and on stage by a sinister group of henchmen, usually similarly clad in black, who do his every bidding. The way in which Scarpia makes his entrance once more reinforces the idea of his absolute power, as it interrupts a rather cheerful cantata. Just before Scarpia's appearance, the sacristan has heard some good news: the defeat of Napoleon at Marengo, which represents a victory of the Church over freethinkers. The sacristan has just shared the news with a group of choir boys who have started dancing wildly in celebration; although he tries repeatedly to quiet them, the sacristan is unable to restore the church's serenity. However, the moment that Scarpia enters, his musical theme completely cuts off the music that was being played, and the boys' cheerfulness evaporates. That which the sacristan, a person who is meant to have some authority over the boys, was not able to do even when he tried, Scarpia does naturally with his mere presence. In most productions he is shown as an imposing figure, usually dressed in dark clothes, sometimes wearing a large cape that billows out around him, reinforcing visually the image of a powerful and imposing personality – but no matter what we see on stage, the music by itself leaves no doubt as to his overwhelming presence. As the baritone Bryn Terfel says: 'Do I stride in purposefully? Do I have a mean, horrible face? No, it's all in the music.'[11] The music leaves no doubt as to Scarpia's power, as it is overpowering in itself, silencing the music that was heard before he appeared on stage.

Shortly after this dramatic entrance, Tosca returns to the church. Scarpia had come to the church in search of Angelotti, and he correctly suspects that Cavaradossi helped him escape. He assumes that, if he can find Cavaradossi, he will find Angelotti as well, and he sets about a plan to trick Tosca into leading him to her lover. Angelotti's sister had been coming to the church rather frequently, as she had to hide some objects in her family's chapel to help her brother to make his escape. On one of her expeditions, she inadvertently left her fan in the church. Scarpia has found it and recognised it by the crest as hers. Knowing Tosca to be a jealous woman, he shows her the fan whilst insinuating that its owner and Cavaradossi are having an affair. Tosca is both heart-broken and infuriated, and as Scarpia had suspected, she goes straight to Cavaradossi's villa to confront him. Scarpia has his men follow her, so that they may know Cavaradossi's whereabouts. Scarpia has used his knowledge of Tosca's personality in order to exert pressure on her. He has gained a little power over her by trickery and by exploiting one of her weaknesses. In the music and particularly by the use of voice in this passage, the audience may recognise the power Scarpia has over Tosca, and precisely her

[10]M. Carnner, *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca*. (Cambridge, 1985), 22.
[11]A. Pappano (cond.) *Tosca* (2011) Giacomo Puccini (comp.). 'Puccini – Tosca (2011)'. Video. YouTube, 30 December 2011. Available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xXJyfe2qxo> [Accessed 29.1.13]

own lack of power: Scarpia's lines are always calm and composed, as he is in perfect control of the situation, whilst Tosca more than once lashes out, having lost control over the situation.

By the music in Act I Scarpia has been established as the dominant character of the opera. However, he also has a weakness: he madly desires Tosca. Although she is unaware of it until later, she has a certain degree of power over Scarpia. It is not until events unfold in Act II that she starts to use this power, but it is introduced to the viewer in Act I: after Tosca leaves, Scarpia sings about the snare he has set for Cavaradossi, using Tosca's ingenuity, and how he will kill the one, possess the other. Although these words support the image of absolute power over Tosca and Cavaradossi, they are contrasted by Scarpia's final words of this Act, 'Tosca, mi fai dimenticare Iddio!'[12] ('Tosca, you make me forget God'). Although Scarpia is, at that time, still in the church, surrounded by the chorus singing the *Te Deum*, Tosca occupies his mind to an extent where he becomes unaware of his surroundings and loses himself to his fantasies. This instance also illustrates the hypocrisy of the Church as perceived by Puccini: Scarpia, a servant of God, forgets who and where he is in a moment of lustful passion. Fundamentally, however, it demonstrates Scarpia's obsessive desire for Tosca, and, if she were aware of these feelings and were to use them against Scarpia, the power she could have over him.

In the first half of the second Act, Scarpia is still the dominant figure. His men have found Cavaradossi and have him locked up in a torture chamber. Tosca is soon seized and taken in, to witness her lover's torture. She manages to end Cavaradossi's torment by giving Scarpia the information he wants, which, however, enrages Cavaradossi, who had beseeched her not to speak. Moreover, the danger has not passed for the couple: Scarpia now threatens to have Cavaradossi executed. His price for Cavaradossi's life is Tosca herself. Tosca's loss of control is at its most dire when she sings her famous aria *Vissi d'arte* ('I lived for art'), in which she asks God why he has crushed her with such misfortune after she has led a pious life[13]. Everything in this aria suggests powerlessness. The aria begins *ppp dolcissimo* (quiet and slow), and Tosca's voice, as she utters the first words of the aria, is the musical equivalent of a miserable whimper as she sings to no-one in particular. Not only is Tosca's hopelessness expressed through the music, it is also often shown on stage by the position of the soprano singing Tosca's part: the aria has often been performed from a prone position on the ground, reinforcing visually the image of a woman who feels crushed by her hopeless situation.

[12]Giacosa & Illica, *Tosca*, 52.
[13] Carner, *Giacomo Puccini. Tosca*, 112.

As for the deeper struggle of the individual with a powerful but corrupt institution, this scene illustrates rather clearly Puccini's ideas. On the stage, in Scarpia's office, where this Act is set, a large crucifix usually adorns one of the walls: although Scarpia is only the chief-of-police, he is a servant of God who answers to the pope[14] and as such, he is an extension of this powerful system. Puccini wants to show his audience the hypocrisy of clerical authority, which hides behind a mask of godliness whilst it will allow anything to preserve its own power. Moreover, the torture that Cavaradossi has been subjected to has become a religious affair as Cavaradossi is coming closer to death. Just before Tosca gives in, sobbing softly, Spoletta, Scarpia's most important henchman, chants a prayer in the background: 'Iudex ergo cum sedebit, Quidquid latet, apparebit: Nil inultum remanebit', which comes from the *Dies Irae*, a hymn customarily sung in the Catholic Requiem mass for the deceased, which in this case bodes ill for Cavaradossi. However, the particular phrase that Spoletta sings and repeats has another meaning: 'When the judge takes his seat, whatever is hidden shall become apparent: nothing shall remain unpunished'. In the hymn this refers to the final judgement of Christ, but in this case it obviously alludes to Tosca's imminent confession that Scarpia is forcing from her with violence. The power of God is mixed up with the corrupt power of an institution. Moreover, the prayer reflects that the torture is sanctified by the Church[15], drawing a comparison between Tosca's confession to Scarpia with that of a sinner to Christ.

After the aria, Tosca strikes a bargain with Scarpia: her lover's life, for her own modesty. At this point Tosca starts to take control and to use the little power she has over Scarpia: not only does she want her lover to be spared, she also demands a passport for both of them with which they can escape the country. Scarpia agrees. Although he says he cannot openly let Cavaradossi go free, instead of having him hanged, Cavaradossi will face a firing squad, but the execution will be fake: he shall be shot with blanks. After Scarpia has signed all the necessary documents, he advances towards Tosca and grabs her in a violent embrace, not aware that she is hiding a knife that she has taken from the dining table behind her back. As he tries to rape her, she stabs him in the heart, reversing their roles instantly, seizing all the power and leaving Scarpia with none. He screams for help ('Soccorso! Aiuto!'[16] – 'Help! Rescue me!'), but to no avail. From one moment to the next, the dominant character of the two is utterly powerless, whilst the subjugated one has risen to a position of power over the other. Tosca screams at Scarpia – and in reality, the soprano sings, *fortissimo*, to the baritone: 'Questo è il bacio di Tosca!'[17] ('This is Tosca's kiss!'), reinforcing with this imagery her momentary victory over him. Scarpia had exerted pressure on her to get what he wanted –

[14]DiGaetani, *Puccini the Thinker. The Composer's Intellectual and Dramatic Development*, 64.
[15]*Ibid*., 67-8.
[16]Giacosa & Illica, *Tosca*, 70.
[17]*Ibid*.

sexual favours – but gets something quite different from a kiss. The irony in these words supports the total reversal of the characters' positions.

However, Tosca is a pious woman. Although the physical threat that Scarpia posed has been removed, there is now a sense of guilt that will continue to haunt her. Instead of removing herself from the system which she has just defeated, Tosca immediately turns to it for help. Having defeated Scarpia, or rather the clerical oppression that he stood for, she chooses not to renounce it and remains in its power. The first thing Tosca does after the murder is to perform an improvised ceremony: she places two candles beside Scarpia's corpse and takes a crucifix from the wall (or in some versions, for instance the 2011 Pappano production, from her own neck[18]) and places it on Scarpia's chest. The physical power that Scarpia had over her may be gone, but his death has not necessarily improved Tosca's situation – his influence is still there. This, again, is supported by the music: Scarpia's theme recurs even in the third Act, after his death[19].

Act III is situated on the *Castel Sant'Angelo*, the Roman prison where Cavaradossi is being kept. In this Act, Cavaradossi sings his famous aria *E lucevan le stelle* ('And the stars were shining'), in which he recalls his happy moments with Tosca. After the aria, Tosca enters and tells him of the murder and her plan to escape. Together they plan how Cavaradossi will fake his own death, how he must fall so as to make it look real. After this duet, the firing squad enters. Cavaradossi is led away and Tosca hides to watch the mock execution. Here she is still under the impression that she has truly conquered Scarpia, and that all will end well for her and Cavaradossi. But Scarpia has tricked them, and Cavaradossi is shot with real bullets instead of blanks. Cavaradossi's death reinstates Scarpia as the dominant character. Instantly the power that Tosca had claimed is taken away from her, and returned to Scarpia - or if not to the man himself, then to the oppressive system that he represents. Furthermore, as Tosca is still weeping over Cavaradossi's body, Scarpia's men are closing in on her. Scarpia's body has been found and she, having been the last person with him, is an obvious suspect. She is at the top of the *Castel Sant'Angelo*, a tall building, and the only exits are blocked by Scarpia's men. She has, therefore, two options: to surrender, or to jump. Tosca chooses the latter. This in itself can be seen as a restoration of her own power. Rather than to surrender and be at the mercy of the torturers she has been fighting throughout the opera (whether in the shape of Scarpia himself, or the system that he represented), Tosca chooses to die with her lover. As she jumps, we hear the melody of *E lucevan le stelle*, Cavaradossi's aria, rather than Scarpia's

[18] A. Pappano (cond.) Tosca (2011) Giacomo Puccini (comp.). 'Puccini – Tosca (2011)'. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xXJyfe2qxo> [Accessed 29.1.13]
[19] Keeffe 'The music of Puccini's "Tosca"', 17.

*motif*. This grants some support to the view of Tosca extricating herself from Scarpia's power with her fatal leap. Another aspect of this scene that grants plausibility to that view is that before jumping to her death, Tosca shouts 'Scarpia, davanti a Dio!'[20] ('Scarpia – before God!'), suggesting that she is prepared to face judgement and just punishment for her actions only from God and not from anyone else – not even from those who are meant to represent God on earth. Even a woman as religious as Tosca must realise by now that the system in which she has placed her trust has misused its power. She undermines Scarpia's faction by depriving them of the opportunity to try her, and punish her, for his murder.

The question must be raised, however, what sort of choice did Tosca really have? Although she managed to escape Scarpia's men, she had to take her own life in order to escape. Seeing that neither of her options were what she would have done if given free choice, her suicide cannot really be considered a restoration of her own power. It would appear that even after his death, Scarpia is still in control. Cavaradossi has been killed by Scarpia's trickery, and Tosca herself is driven to suicide by those who did his bidding and continued to do so after his death. Although the power shifts from Scarpia to Tosca in Act II, it is taken back by Scarpia at the last. Even if Tosca denies Scarpia's side a certain power over her, the fact remains that the corrupt force that he represented has not yielded.

The power struggle, in conclusion, is settled in favour of Scarpia, who is established in Act I as the dominant character and whose power is undermined only briefly in Act II. His *motif* that keeps recurring throughout the opera demonstrates that, despite his physical removal from the stage, his power has not diminished. When Tosca tries to use the limited power she has over Scarpia against him, the situation escapes her control and she loses everything. Although Scarpia dies by Tosca's hand, his power is too well-established and far-reaching to be defeated so easily. Scarpia represents a whole system of corruption and evil, whilst Tosca is, and remains throughout the work, a solitary character, a lone victim of this system. The dominant, more powerful character, therefore, must be Scarpia. It is interesting to see what this tells us about Puccini's own thoughts on the system in the real world that his fictional Scarpia represented: the Church. The Church is in this work associated with brutal, cruel powers that show no mercy to the individuals they are meant to protect, and it retains its power until the end of the opera. It would seem, therefore, that *Tosca* dramatises not only a defeat of the individuals Tosca and Cavaradossi by Scarpia, but also that of the freethinker by the Church.

[20]Giacosa & Illica, *Tosca*, 77.

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