LLIDS

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# Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies

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As we come to the close of a year, spent enclosed within our homes in the most bizarre dread of the unknown, trembling with each gush of air that may have touched another, life stands altered. With countries trying alternatively to capture back the normal that was before the pandemic or rushing forward to embrace the still evolving new normal, individuals are left stranded, each trying to find a way forward for oneself. Hope and faith are two human aspects that make us thrive from one generation to another. Coronavirus vaccines have indeed presented us with a renewed hope for life, as we put our faith in medical sciences once again. The team of *LLIDS* too underwent problems related to COVID-19, which has delayed our publication schedule significantly. We hope to remedy this in time over our future Issues and through the unwavering support of our extended family, our readers!

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# LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (LLIDS)

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# EDITORS' NOTE

*Deeksha Suri & Md. Faizan Moquim*

Jean-Luc Nancy reconceived the state of meaning in our world as a 'flight of sense,' where the meanings ebbed away from the cracks of this vessel of world. In the face of this looming absencing of sense, philosophy is required to reposition itself to deal with thinking about sense. His words find uncanny relevance in our post-COVID scenario: "[…] the destitution of the authority of sense or of sense as authority, and the entry into the unheard-of. For the unheard-of, one has to get one's ears ready. All of this has just barely begun […]" (109). Today, we are in the middle of "unheard-of" times, exposed to realities that have jeopardized the tapestry of our lives. Movement as such is closed; *aporia* has opened.

The noun *aporia*, and the corresponding verb *aporein* ('to be in a state of *aporia*'), are derived from the root of the noun *poros* (passage, pathway, way/means of achieving). In Greek, it means a point that resists any movement forward. The relation between sense-making enterprise and *aporia* signifies two inter-related meanings: first, a mental state characterized by puzzlement, and second, its cause—i.e. forms of enquiry—and its object—i.e. situations. That is why, in the philosophical traditions of Ancient Greece, for instance, *aporia* constituted a methodology of analysis. Generally, though, to-be-in-a-state-of-*aporia* means that one is somehow—due to contradictions, conflicts, paradoxes—caught in a *cul-de-sac* of thought without finding a way out of it. In other words, aporetic moment challenges the act of sense-making.

As the *cul-de-sac* of thought, *aporia* is an inappropriable 'event,' otherness of which lies outside any category of understanding—a "place where *it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem*" (Derrida 12; Italics in the original). Rodolphe Gasché theorizes about aporia as a "heuristic point of departure for philosophy" (344) which entails the passage of getting lost to discover novel ways of engaging with thought. The events of "uncanny" and "sublime" within the philosophical discursive practices can be interpreted as possible domains of *aporia*, where boundaries and certainties are blurred in the liminal space they occupy. In them, the thought remains situated at a place where these *events* cannot be encapsulated within a determinate structure: of not only a solution but even its problematics. Set against the dialectical progress of rational thought, the existence of *aporia* challenges the closed space of logos, and allows for the prospecting of new meanings from within. Devoid of all landmarks, it stands against the interpreted theorizations—immanent to the thought—of the world. As the inescapable truth of both modernity and post-modernity, *aporia* remains the absolute other of the possibilities of sense making—always surviving outside the episteme, demanding constant semiological transitions.

In the openness of its space, *aporia* has the effect of pushing the thinking subject out of his embedded context, as he gets unhinged from his teleological constructions to face a crisis of agency and identity. This disorientation challenges Cogito's reflexive understanding of himself as the rational ground of certainty and questions his affirmations of meanings in the objective world. In unfamiliar ways, uncanny

juxtapositions within the aporetic otherness bares such interludes where the rational subject stands disconcerted, unhinged from the logos of his world. The conceptual formations of *aporia* by this stranded subject keep recoiling within the confines of thought, and all its linguistic significations embroil themselves in a transcending experience of the non-understanding of things. Artists and thinkers employ it to rethink the poetics of making home, and thereby attempt to understand what it means to be human.

Our post-COVID reality reconceptualizes aporetic moments as the organizing logic of the contemporary world where systems have failed us, and the vector of historical movement stands transfixed. In this bleakness, the *aporetic* space expresses itself through a sense of indeterminacy, not bound to the cause-and-effect logic, that remains poised within the cracks of our civic existence as unresolvable internal contradiction. This sense of indeterminacy, thereafter, burgeons into uncanny images of unhomeliness in our times where one yearns to belong in this bleak topography of existence. Such unhomeliness, not limited to our experiential domain, has steeped our philosophical, cultural, and technological spheres as well. It draws attention to the secure boundaries of what we call our "home," and to other fences within which narrative(s) of civilization and anthropocentricism are played out.

Holding on to fragments of the episteme created over the past centuries, with renewed attempts to capture into language the unhomeliness we are hurled into, we face our present crisis that questions our way of living and engulfs the very semblance of our co-operational rational existence. Current Issue of the journal, invested in the enquiries surrounding *aporia*, presents Iqra Raza's paper in the themed section which engages with the works of Ishtiyaq Shukri and focuses upon the spectrality of his protagonists. Occupying the space of neither the living nor the dead, their absent presence resists the history of oppression, thereby navigating the in-between spaces to narrate and create an alternative historiography involving the post 9/11 Muslim experience and the subsequent 'war on terror' narrative. In the special submission section, Jack Haydon Williams explores the cinematic practices of John Grierson; contextualizing Grierson in the Documentary Film Movement, it shows how democratized media in the digital age negotiates with the political and economic determinant. Stavroula Anastasia Katsorchi's paper takes us through the effects of Big Data extraction algorithms to show how the agency and free will of netizens are compromised to the extent that—even though "technology is the offspring of humanity's alleged scientific rationality"—the anthropocentric myth of human control is dismantled in the new era of data Enlightenment in 21st century.

While we have been stranded in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, with its repercussions resounding across the globe, as economies get undermined and political propagandas manifest themselves, publishing this Issue has been one of the few consolations we have had that give us special delight. This pandemic has tested our preparedness at various levels, but we owe gratitude to the scholars who have stood with us in solidarity through their relentless efforts.

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# I (can't) See You: Politics of In/visibility in the Writings of Ishtiyaq Shukri

Iqra Raza | University of Delhi
[http://ellids.com/archives/2021/02/4.2-Raza.pdf](http://ellids.com/archives/2021/02/4.2-Raza.pdf)

**Abstract |** This paper seeks to study the shift in representation of the Muslim body (within the context of War on Terror) from figuration of an embodied autonomous subjectivity to a disembodied one haunting through the remnants of its presence, via a close textual analysis of Ishtiyaq Shukri's novels *The Silent Minaret* (2005) and *I See You* (2014). The paper seeks to explore the notions of power and resistance that inform Shukri's concerns wherein *spectrality* operates both as a mode of resistance against surveillance mechanisms and as the culmination of the neo-colonial Empire's necropolitics. It will particularly explore the implications of *spectrality* for bodies located within the neo-colonial epistemological project that reduces the status of the 'othered subject' to that of an object. Conceptualizing *spectrality* as the dominant mode of the post 9/11 novels, the paper engages with Derrida's work on mourning in relation to specters which call attention to the anomaly that plagues the present and, in doing so, offers a new paradigm for an understanding of the post 9/11 Muslim experience.

**Keywords |** Spectrality, Historiography, Mourning, Ishtiyaq Shukri, South African Anglophone writing, Muslim Experience, War on Terror, Derrida

The corporeal experience of the Muslim body situated within the framework of War on Terror (WOT) in general and the bodies incarcerated within Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib[1] in particular is often conceptualized as being the locus of violence. However, a turn to the violated space of the individual body without an acknowledgement of the markers of race and alterity scripted on it fail to bridge the negotiation between bodies as they are located within the politics of neo-colonial Empire[2] and their representation within a text. While much of the literature responding to War on Terror focuses on visibility as a counter discourse to the (mis)representations of the Muslim experience,[3] Ishtiyaq Shukri[4] offers an alternative possibility in writing protagonists that are specters, haunting the texts through their absent presence. The question that then arises is how far does Shukri venture in his novels—*The Silent Minaret* and *I See You*—when he layers the experience of the incarcerated body anchored to a specific history, on to an absent presence, as a stylistic challenge in his works? In choosing to erase the presence of the material body from the space of the textual world, Shukri hints at a radical subversion made possible by taking the 'Spectral turn' within a context wherein the subject is construed as an object of knowledge.

While this subversion might also be doomed by the possibility of labeling the unknowable as 'dangerous' rendering such an attempt counter-productive, Shukri treads with caution. He takes care to build in the everydayness of the protagonists' lives (before their disappearance) with minute details, making them relatable and unrelatable at once. The Muslim experience is mediated through a presence which exists (in its absence) outside the epistemic registers and the textual world. The spectral nature of the protagonists' presence becomes potent, especially in juxtaposition to the embodied violence that characterizes the corporeal experience of the Muslim body, in the wake of War on Terror as evidenced by the photographs that emerged from Guantanamo and Abu

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[1]The two infamous extra-territorial prison complexes commanded and controlled by the United States which mainly held detainees of the Global War on Terror. These places were notorious for the torture techniques administered on the detainees.

[2]The term used here and subsequently in the paper refers to the neo-colonial politics of the United States, especially those concerning the operations of the global War on Terror. Variously theorized by Anne McClintock, Engseng Ho, and others, it includes in its ambit the obvious territorial invasion and also the more subtle and insidious practices such as the creation and proliferation of discourses.

[3]A vast number of Anglophone writers have turned to employing 9/11 as a central plot device while introducing nuance into their representation of the Muslim and his/her experience in the aftermath of it. Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2004), and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) are a few of the popular examples. Other writers like Monica Ali and Tahmima Anam have also employed the trope to different ends in their works.

[4]Shukri is an award-winning Journalist-turned writer from South Africa whose works deal with global geopolitical concerns and their impact on individual lives.

Ghraib (with a deliberate erasure of faces) leaving for the viewers mere bodies in sight, anchored to the history of colonization. The body, through its link with visual economy lends itself readily to taxonomy, and encodes differences in its rootedness to ontology, thus, becoming a potent site for both scripting power hierarchies as well as subverting them. The paper argues that Shukri's texts, in their suggestion of the radical possibility of non-presence, subvert the power hierarchy reminiscent of colonization. *Spectrality* in its theoretical ramifications has been often summoned in studies done on 9/11 but has largely remained unexplored within the context of the War on Terror and the United States' neo- colonial practices. Shukri's works demonstrate the implications of politics of in/visibility for racialized Muslim bodies trying to negotiate with a civilization that has regressed to racial taxonomy in order to demarcate its 'other.'

Ishtiyaq Shukri in his narrative posits the idea of transnational, cosmopolitan exchange of ideas as well as goods, such as that between the protagonist and his landlady,[5] as a means of knowability of the neo-colonial Empire's 'other.' At the heart of this political narrative of power and its 'other,' lies the potentiality for a blurring of the boundaries between 'us' and 'them,' by transcending one's fixed subject positions and allowing for a meaningful exchange. For Shukri, it is the immediate experience of encounter(s) with the 'other' that allow us to truly understand and open ourselves to them. However, this idea of 'knowability' is suggested as a mere possibility rather than an actualized activity, because of the limitations and danger of (mis)appropriation such a knowledge claim entails. Shukri writes with an awareness that the many forms of colonial subjugation, predicated precisely upon a claim to complete knowledge of the 'other,' were often (mis)used to justify 'otherness' (Bhattacharya 2018). He is wary of making such claims so much so that even by the time his novels end, the readers cannot decipher the identity and whereabouts of the central protagonists with certainty. Instead of emphasizing on the protagonists themselves, the texts focus on their absent-presence, utilizing the framework of *spectrality* to mark a discursive shift from ontology to 'hauntology' (Derrida, *Specters* 10), implicative of the number of bodies picked up and disappeared from within the US Empire. While they are not manifested in material forms, their ghosts continue to haunt the characters and later the readers as well. The characters do not just 'characterize' themselves and the times they occur in, but represent the sum total of the history/ies of oppression across the globe. Derridean 'hauntology' utilizes the ghost as a metaphor to talk about a 'return,' making hauntology a disruption—occurring along both temporal as well as ontological axes—of the presence where it is replaced by its 'non-origin.' *Spectrality*, within the scope of the texts, thus becomes a functional metaphor. It marks a shift from visibility to invisibility, and in doing so lays bare the obliterations—of people, races, states, histories, cultures and spaces. Spectrality allows the protagonists of Shukri's texts to operate beyond their immediate coordinates as they bring the past, the future, the absences, and the presences on a single plane offering a

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[5]Shukri saturates the text with examples of exchanges that play a vital role in shaping a counter-discourse to the widely circulating one of civilizational superiority that locates two races/nations/religions as binary opposites with no point of convergence. Within the context of WOT, as images and discourses identified the Muslim as the 'other,' Shukri's Catholic character, Frances, finds and celebrates the overlaps between Islam and Christianity because of the exchange of ideas she has had with the protagonist, Issa, and the gift of Tasbih she receives from him. As the Tasbih and the rosary intertwine in her little pouch, she uses a neologism to bridge the gap between the two, calling it a "Trosebery" (*Silent Minaret* 6).

holistic view of issues geographically and temporally varied, within a synchronic time frame. Thus, the War on Terror can be linked to colonial violence at the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century. Spectrality for Shukri is less an ontological concern, veering more towards social and political implications of the same instead.

*The Silent Minaret* unfolds the story of a seemingly futile search for the protagonist undertaken by his kin as they try to locate him through the many cues he has left behind. After watching horrifying images from Guantanamo being projected onto the screen at Baghdad Café, and subsequently realizing the extent of tyranny being unleashed by the neo-colonial regimes of the West which were saturated by signifiers that echoed a sense of historical similitude, Issa Shamsuddin "slip(s) through the door into a dawn that is beginning to illuminate the devastation wrought by the violent night" (*Silent Minaret* 48). Issa never speaks to the readers in the text, except through indirect means, such as through his inscriptions and annotations on margins of certain books. He is present in the text only through his absence, which is alluded to more than once in the novel. The text draws attention to Issa's non-presence within it by way of italicizing his past dialogues. The stylistic function of italicization serves to underscore the fact of the protagonist's existence outside the text and consequently the epistemic register of the world he inhabits/ed which has both positive and negative connotations to it. While *choosing* to remain outside the epistemic registers hints at possible subversion, being *made* to stay outside it is constitutive of marginalization. A presence turned into a political specter, shifted out of the frame of the neo-colonial regime's body politic, Issa subverts his marginalized position by choosing to turn into a specter that haunts through the remnants of his presence. The cues that he leaves in his wake work to accentuate the vacuum created by his absence, drawing attention to the political ramifications of marginalization and spectrality, which in certain contexts can be used interchangeably; in that, to be marginalized is to be a political specter and vice versa. Marginalization however does not occur totally outside the episteme; it is rather made legible through its becoming a supplement to the dominant political discourse—the aesthetic, social, and political consequences of which Shukri skillfully explores.

Shukri's second novel appears ten years after the first, tracing a temporal continuity. The political shift from President Bush to President Obama's administration and a dramatic upheaval against the Republicans that led to changes in policies and politics of the United States is well reflected in *I See You*. *I See You* is a story of its protagonist's disappearance. Tariq Hasan, an award-winning photojournalist, has been abducted, incarcerated, and tortured by ZAR Corps, a mercenary organization, for his vocal criticism of their practices, especially their involvement in foreign territories. While the forces of political power in the two novels are different, the tyranny unleashed by them is similar in that both take the individual body as a site for enacting violence. Thus, both Issa and Tariq, the individual-protagonists of the two novels are there, but not there, leaving spectral images of suffering to fill the textual space.

However, before launching into a textual analysis of the novels, it is crucial to contextualize the theorization of the dis/appearance of the body within history. A stress on ghosts and haunting dominated and grounded the human psyche's cognition of what it meant to be a non-presence in the late nineteenth century, manifested most cogently in

articulations of the Gothic. While the ghost existed as a powerful metaphor to signify a return of the past, much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century theorization rejected the ghostly and occultism, most significantly brought about in Sigmund Freud's reluctance to assign any supernatural association to his conceptualization of the *uncanny* and in Theodor Adorno's *Theses against Occultism*. Criticizing Western occultism and classifying it as something regressive, Adorno's text largely operated within the context of enlightenment that still held empirical epistemology as the only possibility. The potency of a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation was first manifested in the late twentieth century as ghosts gave way to Specters that could "do" theory. While the ghost figure had the potential for theoretical foundation, it was left unexplored till the twentieth century when it was no longer a supernatural figure, but offered ethical alternatives instead. Thus, besides its aesthetic function, the ghost "perform[ed] theoretical work" (Lord 92), fulfilling an analytical role as well. Jacques Derrida's Heideggerian revisitation in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question from 1987* further supported it. However, by the time it appeared, *Specters of Marx* had already camouflaged the ghostly into the idea of a specter. The ghost thus ceased to be an actual manifestation of the spooky return from dead and carried instead socio-political ramifications. The terminology of 'specter' shifted theoretical gears with its etymological link to vision, becoming something which is both looking and looked at (spectacle). This turn underscored previously unexplored features of the specter such as its liminal position between numerous dichotomies viz. materiality and immateriality, life and death, looking and being looked at, presence and non-presence. This liminal position of the specter posed a series of social, political, and ethical questions. In its relation to "the deconstructive thinking of the trace, of iterability, of prosthetic synthesis, of supplementarity and so forth," (Derrida, *Specters* 75) the ghost figure got imbued with political, ethical potential, a figure of clarification rather than obscurity.

Writing about the late twentieth century turn of the theoretical underpinnings of the specter, Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren write:

> To believe or not believe in ghosts no longer involves a determination about the empirical (im)possibility of the supernatural, but indicates contrasting validated attitudes—a welcoming seen as ethical and enabling, and a rejection considered unethical and dispossessing—towards the uncertainty, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy that characterize language and Being because of their inevitable entanglement with alterity and difference. (Blanco and Peeren 9)

Ceasing to be a question of the supernatural and belief, the ghost instead represents everything occurring outside the normative, and an acceptance or rejection of it, thus, no longer implies reason or the lack of it but ethical standards instead. The movement away from centrality of the rationale to that of ethics provides a fertile ground for the shift of the metaphor of specter as well. Insofar as it represents possibilities, diagnostics, and alternatives the specter prompts us to question where our ethics lie, instead of in/validating our rational ability. For Derrida as well, a ghost is not so much a return of the dead than it is a metaphorical signifier which exists to raise questions pertaining to justice in the radical possibility of its non-being. Talking about the difference of the specter from the ghost, Derrida says,

The specter is first and foremost something visible. It is of the visible, but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood. It resists the intuition to which it presents itself, it is not tangible [...] What happens with spectrality, is that something becomes almost visible which is visible only insofar as it is not visible in flesh and blood. ("Spectrographies" 38)

Insofar as the specter exists defined by its very nature of being non-present, it escapes epistemological and empirical possibilities. Derrida writes that, "One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge" (*Specters* 5). While the specter exists outside the epistemic registers, it is often the figure that shines light on alternative episteme, on what is placed outside the box of epistemology, and in doing so also questions the nature and mechanisms of its production. The specter—in fiction that engages with the implications of 'War on Terror,' for bodies tied to a history of unequal power relations between the colonizer and the colonized—offers the radical possibility of subversion. Moreover, as Derrida argues, the specter disrupts chronology drawing attention to the limits of historicization or to the anomaly that exists in the present which can take the form of injustice, disempowerment, etc. It holds suspect the historical grand narrative, offering instead fragmented versions of history that have remained inaccessible thus far. In Wendy Brown's words, the Derridean specter presents a "rejection of historical totalization in favor of fragmented and fragmentary historiography" (Brown 167).

Contemporary theorizations of "spectropolitics"[6] have focused on how subjects can be prone to variegated forms of erasure—social, political, and cultural. The functionality of the absent protagonist in Shukri's texts extends precisely to these conceptualizations insofar as they engage with both the past and the present, critiquing the politics that has rendered them in/visible while also offering new possibilities. Unearthing the lost strands of history is one of the chief concerns of both Shukri as well as his protagonist Issa, a student of history. In Issa's absence, it is his thesis that fulfills the function of illuminating the alternative course of history traced by him, one that proposes a subaltern account of the historical events and their significance.

Specters, as Derrida theorizes, call to attention the anomaly of the present and in doing so, offer a diagnostic for it. The present always tries to 'come to terms' with the past by engaging in a dialogue with it, via specters who act as catalysts for such a process. The specter engages with the past and presents it as an injunction of sorts for the present. What eventually allows the past to 'haunt' the present is the attempt at conjuration or a retrieval of the past—done here by tracing an alternate historiography. Rewriting history is not a process of destruction of one in favor of another but rather locating the aporia in the existing narrative and offering radical possibilities. And Shukri's works lend themselves to precisely such a reading. In *The Silent Minaret,* Shukri fashions Issa as the

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[6]In contemporary theorization, 'Spectropolitics' refers to a politics of spectrality, which not just contends with the spectral nature of politics itself but also focuses on how and why subjects turn into specters in their susceptibility to various forms of erasure. Critics like Appadurai, Mbembe, and Gordon use the framework of spectrality for such an analysis rather than utilizing the discourses of nationality, postmodernism, postcolonialism, globalization, etc.

spectral presence who creates a rupture in hegemonic discourses, beginning with the totalizing tendency of European historical discourse. Issa, a research scholar of history, undertakes the task of addressing the fissures created by a quite literal "whitewashing" of history by giving an alternative historiographical account of the colonization of the Cape wherein Islam as a religion played an indispensable role in the anti-colonial uprising. Issa is acutely aware that historical discourse concerns itself with constructing versions of the past in the present that can best serve the power structures in future. It is made intelligible by structuring events (which entails editing and omissions as well) into a coherent narrative, subject to power structures that are in place at a given time. Historiography, contrary to its claim of objectivity, is a very subjective discourse riddled with fissures (Foucault 373–86). Problematizing the 'givenness' that historical narratives often assume, Issa attempts to rescue a history manufactured by the colonialists from the amnesia that plagues it by wedging in the missing pieces. Inevitably, this problematization of history also serves to question the political, social, and cultural valuations that arise from a noncritical acceptance of the truth value that these narratives claim. At one moment, when Issa (presented here as Kagiso's memory) confronts his history teacher at school with another version of the history of Anglo-Boer war, the latter retorts: "History cannot be re-written […] History *is*, and at St Stephen's we accept only the thorough, rigorous and sanctioned historical versions outlined in the syllabus" (*Silent Minaret* 16; italics original). For Shukri, and his protagonist Issa, "history however, cannot be told in a straight line" (16). It is neither linear nor singular, but characterized by a multiplicity of narratives.

Linda Hutcheon, writing about what she calls "historiographical metafiction," says that the merit of such texts lies in the fact that they do not claim to be the Truth but one version of it, since "there is no Truth, but truths in the plural" (18). Shukri proposes the idea that there are indeed many different versions of truth, historical or otherwise, depending on who is writing it. The power structures play a central role in determining the sway of history. In *The Silent Minaret*, Kagiso interrupts the officially sanctioned historical narrative when he refers to the 'native' history of the Anglo-Boer war that regards Baden Powell not as a hero but a "lying thief," he muses:

> History was not intended to capture this part of the story; Baden-Powell went to great lengths to omit it from his reports and from his diaries [...] But while the Colonel was able to contrive his written submissions of the siege to London, he had less control over the version of events that passed from the mouths of my forefathers into the ears of their descendants. (15)

This paragraph captures Shukri's central questions that propel the narrative—what are the grounds of historical knowledge and how are historical narratives constructed? Unlike the post-modern literary discourse that asserts the impossibility of the existence of 'falseness' per se, Shukri does not let his narrative to slip into contestations for truth, retaining some objectivity and holding it in place by inserting at this point, the role of memory. Demonstrating that historical narratives do not necessarily remain faithful to historical processes, Shukri underscores the idea of a discrepancy between recorded history and memory. Thus, the motif of remembering and forgetting recurs throughout

the novel with torture and forgetfulness having real implications on physical bodies that then turn spectral which will be explored via Shukri's second novel.

In probing the grounds as well as the processes of production of historical knowledge, Shukri also turns to questions of textuality, reference, language, and the nature of the relationship they negotiate with the 'real' processes. Given the fact that history as it is available to us is accessible only as a text, historical discourses, it can be argued, do not exist outside of the text and outside language, making it imperative to interrogate the very nature of text and the nature of language. Textual historiographical reference gets reduced merely to being a 'trace' in the form of a text, making it essential for us to question what is it that accounts for the 'real'? The past is constituted by signs whose meanings can change over time, making history a hunt for the closest approximate sign. The question of what is the 'real,' therefore, further opens up the scope for questioning the various subcategories of genre and eventually to whether historical narrative should be considered any different from a fictional narrative. Hutcheon in talking of historiographical metafiction draws parallels between history and fiction in that both base themselves on verisimilitude rather than empirical truth and are linguistic constructs that not only depend on a very subjective process of semanticization but also on that of apprehension. She further adds the point of intertextuality that is indispensable to both, something Shukri heavily employs in his texts, especially *The Silent Minaret*.

In interspersing his fiction with actual historical references while also imitating the style and structure of a historical narrative, Shukri effectively blurs the distinction between history and fiction. In doing so, he questions the idea of inscrutability of historical discourse and the sacrosanct status it assumes for itself. In narrating the story of Issa's absence, he brings to the fore many other absences, presenting them to us as obliterated presences, spectral and unforgiving. The history of Dutch settlement at Cape Colonial, the cosmopolitan cultures of South African past and the socio-cultural and intellectual history of Islamic expansions are just some of the absences that are rendered visible through the alternate historiography (traced via Issa's thesis) made available to the reader. This interweaving of history and fiction not just serves to question the sacrosanct status of history but also makes an attempt to accord to the novel a function similar to what Issa's thesis fulfils—that of a 'subaltern' historical discourse. To this extent, he not only imitates the style of historical narrative but also makes sure to add copious references and notes at the end of each chapter. Shukri quotes extensively from various history books, novels, philosophical discourses, treatises, newspapers, classical texts, religious scriptures, and Issa's thesis as well. Shukri's subversive intertextuality in referring not just to 'real' texts but to fictional ones as well pays homage to them while underscoring the fuzziness that characterizes the borders of history and fiction. Fusing form and content serves to effectively blur the distinction between the historical and fictional, real and imagined, theme and structure, past and present, etc. The text is fluid flowing like a post-structuralist historical discourse—nonlinear, fragmentary, and subversive—challenging the racist, Eurocentric discourses that are saturated by losses. This rewriting of the discourse is made possible through the process of mourning, as Derrida envisages it, a point this paper later returns to. It is the work of mourning that opens up the past to the present. Issa's and Tariq's texts are presented as reminders that the present is less than perfect. And it is in the process of mourning that the said texts are

alluded to, with Tariq's writings and photographs being circulated over mass media to keep his memory alive and Issa's thesis and notes helping his friends to discover him in his absence.

As stated above, the text raises questions with reference to language as well. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida arguing about the relationship between history and the act of writing says that the former always operates under conditions of *différance,* i.e., the impossibility of finding exactitude and fixity as far as meaning is concerned. Therefore, past as a linguistic articulation can never be presented objectively as 'truth,' rendering all attempts at articulation 'spectral' in that language (re)produces mere traces of the 'original' with meanings always getting deferred. Thus, only a semblance of the event remains captured. Shukri questions the nature of language by going back to definitions and etymologies, in a hunt for the "ghost" of the origin. In *The Silent Minaret*, while dictionary definitions do nothing to help, Kagiso arrives at a possible meaning of the word 'disappearance,' one that can help him reconcile with it in the context of an "Issaless London," he nevertheless understands its implications. Even though the noun "**disappear v.intr**: **1** cease to be visible; pass from sight. **2** cease to exist or be in circulation or use (*trams had all but disappeared*)" (*Silent Minaret* 28) is defined for Kagiso, its meaning still escapes him. It sounds to him "clinical. Improbable" (28). The entire narrative for Kagiso becomes a struggle to negotiate with various meanings of 'disappeared' when put together with the noun, Issa. And it is precisely this struggle that allows him to access various meanings and etymologies from the many and variegated layers of signification that have been accumulated over signs. The obliteration of the intermingled and cross-pollinated histories lets civilizations manufacture narratives of incommensurate differences between 'us' and 'them,' and Shukri writes with precisely this awareness, undercutting such a discourse by enforcing overlaps. *The Silent Minaret*'s specter-protagonist ruptures the surface veneers bringing to the fore the narratives that have always lurked beneath it, not so much directly and by volition as he does indirectly by leaving cues to be unraveled, filling the margins with his non-presence quite literally. The functionality of specter in visibilising the invisible marks it as a potent figure in subaltern discourses which hinge themselves on contestations for meaning making. Thus, Issa disappears himself in order to play a more potent role in interrupting the linear flow of history.

While studying the role of the spectral protagonist of *The Silent Minaret*, it is crucial to note the moment of his disappearance. Issa sits in Baghdad Café with the manuscript of his thesis now finished, behind the *mashrabiya* screen, his eyes transfixed on the television screen flooding images from Guantanamo, "Blurred pictures on the giant screen of heavily shackled men in orange overalls behind high security fences, their arms chained behind their backs to their feet" (43). A photograph is also an embodiment of spectrality, superimposing past and present. And it is precisely in this context that Issa apprehends the photographic images. As emblems of the suffering that is an instance of the past, to Issa, they stand in for both the remote past (as a reminder of the colonial history) as well as the immediate present (in his sudden awareness of how violence permeates the everyday experience of the Muslim subject). He watched "as history rose up from the open manuscript on his table and came to hover between him and the images on screen" (43). Thus, deeply affected and haunted indeed by the images of suffering on

the screen, Issa suddenly stands up and walks away; in the process he "brushes past the waiter" (45). However, the waiter, also too absorbed by the spectacle of his ruined hometown, does not notice the movement. Issa in this moment has already become a spectral presence, a non-presence, an absence, for the waiter. Much like Islamic mythology of the djinns (supernatural beings) who leave a scent in their wake, at the moment of Issa's disappearance, the waiter "inhales, trying to decipher the sudden, delicate fragrance - jasmine, violet, rose" (45). It is at this moment that he looks towards the corner seat for the source of the fragrance, only to find that its occupant is no longer visible. But his disappearance has left an alternative historiography for others to see in the form of his thesis, marking already a rupture in historical discourse. Issa's disappearance does not just stem from his recognition of the precariousness of his life but also from his acute knowledge of the way neo-colonial biopolitical regimes rely on individual bodies for their modus operandi. As a diasporic subject, Issa's passport conditions his mobility or the lack thereof within a geopolitical world, tracing movements across borders while at the same time subjecting his body to surveillance under a biopolitical regime. The passport, a document meant to facilitate movements, if branded with the mark of undesirability and otherness, serves to limit mobility.

Issa, like Shukri himself, is stopped and checked by security staff at the airport for his visual attestation to a certain religious (Muslim) and racial belongingness (Arab-African). It is Issa's corporeality and his name that tie him to his Arab and South African heritage, "inscribing his racialized body in terms of an undifferentiated hostile Muslim otherness, effacing all other markers such as class or education" (Aumeerally 15). Issa's resistance to state surveillance and racial and religious profiling is manifested in the form of his disappearance. Corporeal recognition predicates itself on embodied differences; Issa chooses to erase his physical presence from the public record, resisting surveillance and knowability—the epistemic registers of which are saturated by meticulous descriptions of alterity which correspond to Issa's corporeality. Invisibility thus becomes a way to subvert the omnipotence of surveillance mechanisms of imperial institutions that rely on corporeality, as well as to escape being branded as the Empire's 'other.' Calling despised foreign bodies like his own "Europe's Untouchables" (*Silent Minaret* 81), Issa is acutely aware of the ways in which biopolitical control is determined by the politics of taxonomy supplemented by its surveillance technologies. But he wills to resist knowability "even as the tentacles of the war on terror proliferate, delineating a new 'version of recognition [which] would be based less on knowledge than on apprehension of its limits'" (Aumeerally 17). Issa is in the text but a ghostly evocation that can only find his voice through others who engage with the 'traces' of his absent-presence in order to fully comprehend the implications of his spectrality.

Unlike *The Silent Minaret* where Shukri hints at the fact of Issa's disappearance being an act of his own doing (as a subversive measure), *I See You* makes it clear that Tariq has been abducted and incarcerated. So, while Issa's disappearance is a subversion, that of Tariq is a brutally violent manifestation of the neo-colonial regime's necropolitics.[7] Seen in conjunction with the bodies that were picked up and incarcerated

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[7]Mbembe, in his book, *Necropolitics* works on Foucault's idea of 'Biopolitics' in greater detail. Recognizing that the strict demarcations between "resistance and suicide," "martyrdom and freedom" (92)

in Guantanamo, wherein their status as a legal subject was suspended rendering them non-presences legally, Tariq's incarceration draws significant parallels. Questions of the body become especially pertinent to *I See You* because of the specifics of Tariq's abduction and subsequent torture. Rather than *becoming* a spectacle, his abduction is spectral in nature, shaped by censorship. Studying Shukri's two novels simultaneously becomes an exercise in coming to terms with visibility and invisibility of violence respectively. While the first one makes a direct reference to Guantanamo images which were paraded as signifiers of the Empire's moral victory over everything seemingly opposed to it, the second offers insight into unseen excesses of violence through Tariq's account of torture as well as his prize-winning photograph. While *The Silent Minaret* makes violence apparent enough for the protagonist to disappear because of it, *I See You* covers it up, quite literally as well, often using euphemisms to describe torture. The readers never get to see the violence, but only infer it from the various accounts.

Tariq's torture reeks of the human rights violation that haunts Guantanamo. The discourse of the "right to have rights" (Arendt 296) implies that there exist subjects who are less than subjects, since not everyone has the right to have human rights (123–267). This is especially pertinent in the case of Guantanamo where the inmates are represented as less than humans, their alterity further highlighted by their claim to belonging to a certain religion. Islam has since a long time been rendered as the 'other' to everything that the West stands for—civility, democracy, liberty. The philosophical discourse of rights, owing its origins to Immanuel Kant, primarily construes the subject of human rights as being an autonomous, adult, rational, white male (Douzinas 2–3). Human rights are, therefore, for all their universalism, exclusionary in practice. And if a subject cannot avail human rights, it is implicative of their being less than human or non-human, in other words they become non-presences, at least in the legal-political epistemology. It is this kind of spectrality to which Tariq's character lays claim to.

As noted earlier, Derrida attests to the specter's position as both "visible and invisible [...] phenomenal and non-phenomenal" ("Spectrographies" 39). Tariq's character is a specter within the space of the textual world. He haunts the readers by his presence made manifest through his disjointed stream-of-consciousness account of events inside the prison, yet we do not know where he is, if at all he lives. Shukri titles all of Tariq's accounts as "Somewhere" but we're party to Tariq's thoughts everywhere. Tariq's position as the Empire's other is brought about in the very first account we get from him with his emphasis on the colour of his skin "brown," immediately implicating his racial belongingness and corporeality in his *otherness*. He begins to envisage violence on his own brown skin, suddenly "stop[ping]this macabre imagination from unfolding further" (*I See You* 19), thankful that he has "ten healthy intact toes" (19), alerting us to the danger of brutal violence that he is subjected to. Tariq's indeterminable coordinates also draw attention to the possibility of his body being inaccessible even in death.

Dealing at length with torture, Shukri subtly introduces ethics into the scope of the text by implicating the readers in the reading process, forcing them to open

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no longer exist in a necropolitical regime, he introduces the idea of social and political deaths to biopolitical operations.

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themselves to Tariq's presence. As we read through his account, we are subjected to his subjectivity, thus playing a host as well as hostage to his spectral presence. Derrida in *Of Hospitality* writes "it is the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and who really always has been" (125). In this, the host forsakes power, becoming susceptible to the guest's abuse. Therefore, insofar as we empathize with Tariq, we open ourselves to hosting his spectral presence within us. Our powerlessness in the face of his ill-fate also becomes a condition of our opening up of the self to him. So long as the reader admits her inability to do anything about Tariq's sealed fate ending in torture, she allows him into her consciousness, aided by the stylistic technique employed here. Tariq's stream of consciousness journaling of violence inflicted upon his body strikes us with the immediacy and intimacy of his voice. The readers' empathy begins to extend beyond it, becoming eventually, a condition of hosting his absent presence. However, at certain points in his account, we are posed with questions which implicate us in the process of his abuse, of being mute witnesses to the violation of his body. Tariq's account begins to read like a harrowing reminder of slave narratives as he admits his ignorance about circumstances surrounding his captivity. He writes as a clueless victim of violence, shackled and transported from one place to another. Naked and hooded, Tariq narrates of the shame that haunts him by his sudden awareness of being watched. His account of shame at being stripped and the sexual violence that follows it is a haunting reminder of the slave violence of the nineteenth century, recalling the master-slave dynamic between the white colonizer and his coloured subject. In the scene that Shukri constructs for us via Tariq's interiority, it is further imbued with a sense of historical similitude, owing to the latter's acknowledgement of the colour of his skin as well as the specifics of his incarceration and torture. Incarcerated within four white walls without any spatial-temporal coordinates within which to place himself, Tariq writes that it is his male body that further curbs and disallows his awareness of temporality, "Deprived of references, I look to my body as a measure of time… But how reliable a measure of time is the male body? A woman would know a month" (*I See You* 136). Tariq becomes a specter, being haunted by his past and haunting the present. At this juncture, it is important to note the juxtaposition that arises out of Tariq's narrativization of shame and his position within the text. While shame, as Sartre and others after him theorize it,[8] is largely a product of an acknowledgement of visibility or a perception of it, Tariq's character is not a signifier of embodied subjectivity but that of a spectral presence insofar as the space of the textual world remains haunted by him. It is not the same or even similar as claiming that Tariq does not possess a body—he does and brings our attention to his corporeality, and somatic experience time and again—it is rather that Tariq is a specter of the novel, and perhaps so for the characters therein who do not get to know anything about him.

Tariq's transition from a presence to non-presence follows a trajectory similar to that of Issa. Everything happens before anyone can notice. He disappears from the midst of a

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[8]Shame, in Sartre's phenomenological accounts in *Being and Nothingness*, is defined as a mode of consciousness that follows from an acknowledgement of certain aspects of one's being in the presence of an 'other.' By definition, the body becomes the locus for such an experience, obliterating the possibility of a 'spectral' shame. However, the paper argues that while Tariq Hasan possesses a body, his spectralization fulfills a functional role, i.e., he plays the role of a specter while retaining semblance of corporeality, making it possible for him to feel 'shame.'

crowd "within a matter of minutes" (25). There are no witnesses, no proof, nothing recorded on CCTV. Tariq's abduction in its operation is closer to a vanishing than a disappearance, much like Issa's. Like *The Silent Minaret*, *I See You* is preoccupied with the theme of uncovering which is a function of the specter, as mentioned above. For one, Leila Mashal's intention while contesting elections, is to make visible what is "invisible cabal of deep power [that] has no truck with constitutions or manifestos or binding documents enshrining civil rights and liberties" (*I See You* 27). Moreover, she contends that the post-apartheid South Africa has shown no substantial change in its mechanism of political operation, in that the collusion of capital and power remains as interlocked as it was before. Seen through this lens, contemporary South African society is portrayed as a superficial entity that needs to be questioned and uncovered, and it is the specter protagonist of the text viz. Tariq, who makes such an interrogation possible through his being present in his absence.

Important to note at this juncture is the susceptibility of coloured male bodies to the Empire's violence, which follows as a corollary from the War on Terror experience which affected black and brown men most directly. The Muslim experience in Shukri's novels is narrativised as one which is reminiscent of the colonial experience of the past, in that both are shown to trace a temporal continuity. Shukri responds to this legacy of colonial violence by not just making connections to the past but also by showing how it differs from the past by introducing possibilities of subversion as well as the extremities of techno-violence. It would not be a generalization to say that Shukri's texts rely on the in/visibility of violence in order to articulate the Muslim experience which finds expression, most manifestedly in absences within families and an unending period of trauma for the next of kin. As Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx*, the process of mourning for a subject whose place of burial is unlocatable does not cease, making the trauma of the ones left behind outlast the suffering. For Derrida, mourning is indispensable to meaning making and representation. Reformulating Sigmund Freud's theorization of mourning—to which he attributes a subject's way of negotiating with the social order while coming to terms with the loss of an attachment to objects and/or individuals and subsequent attachment to new objects/individuals, a transference made possible via mourning—Derrida argues that all semanticization is involved in mourning. Thus, all attempts at articulation must necessarily find themselves involved in the work of mourning, since language relies on substitutions to make itself comprehensible, and in doing so attempt to fill in the gaps and find what has been lost. Both Shukri's novels as well as Issa's thesis, as already argued, are involved in precisely such a process of meaning making.

As Derrida argues, the mourning that does not cease further opens up possibilities for the 'other' to come into being in their 'otherness,' thus, carrying within itself the very potent seeds of subversion (*Specters* 142). A ceaseless mourning process for an individual is also implicative of their being kept alive in memory while acknowledging their material absence, allowing them to 'haunt' forever, constantly challenging the normative lives being lived. And it is precisely in this context that Leila Mashal, Tariq's wife, publicly mourns his loss while standing for a political office. Tariq's spectral presence is what pushes her to introspect on her own actions to constructive ends, calling her to perform the work of mourning. Leila lets her scars scab into scripts of political

power, much like the post 9/11 Muslim experience of trauma holds the potentiality for ushering in change. It is the encounter with the specter (not always literal) which propels us towards the process of collective mourning, allowing room for subversion. Shukri constructs for his readers such an encounter in order to call to attention the 'unfinished business' of the trauma of War on Terror that we continue to nurture inside us. The post 9/11 Muslim experience, it would suffice to say, is constituted by scars that can never heal, and in being so, retains the possibility of becoming constructive through its continued remembering, making memory the key trope in both the possibilities of mourning as well as consequent subversion.

Shukri, through his novels attempts to make in/visible the lives that are precarious and unworthy of recognition. The texts operate within a biopolitical framework insofar as they suggest the easy dispensation of certain lives. Indeed, both Issa's thesis as well as Tariq's portfolio are driven by their awareness and acknowledgement of this fact and, therefore, the need to make apparent the suffering and to show 'bare lives'[9] of the ones who have been conveniently marginalized, shifted out of the frame. In this context, it is crucial to analyse Tariq's prize-winning image that while on the surface looks like a romanticised photo of bucolic life, when looked at carefully, reveals the brutality of violence that its subjects have been subjected to. Tariq as a war photographer is chiefly concerned with making visible the violence that has hitherto remained invisible and succeeds in making an impact in the society, much like Shukri himself, who through his works makes visible all that had previously remained out of the sight of discourse, historical or otherwise. Shukri succeeds in bringing to the fore the precariousness that haunts coloured Muslim lives insofar as he uses the stylistic device of spectrality with respect to his protagonists, to two different ends in his two novels. While in one, the emphasis is on spectrality as subversion and interruption of the Empire's epistemological project, in the second, it is the violent manifestation of the 'thanatopolitics'[10] of the state. His novels end without a closure, furthering the point of spectrality that was raised, in that the texts open themselves to the possibility of being haunted by the protagonists forever. Thus both his novels end with the lingering absent-presence of the protagonists. As Derrida says in *Specters of Marx* that in the absence of a thing, there remains a spectral element perhaps *more real* than its corporeal form; the reality that is made manifest in and by the protagonists' absence draws attention to the otherwise purposeless fecundity of logos in articulating their political presence. The textual ghosts—Issa's thesis and Tariq's portfolio—cannot be killed and, therefore, take on dimensions that look more alive than their living, embodied counterparts. In making his protagonists haunt the novels and the readers, Shukri radically redefines what it means to 'be' for the Muslim

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[9]Agamben in *Homo Sacer* conceives of a body valued for its productive life force, but not as a political subject capable of contributing to the body politic, making it possible for the Homo Sacer to be killed but not sacrificed, Agamben's work has been contextualized within studies on WOT for their potentiality in analyzing the images that were circulated by the US with an intention to shape discourses surrounding the event.

[10]A concept fleshed out by Giorgio Agamben, it modifies the Foucauldian Biopolitics which is defined as the state's control over its populations' lives. Thanatopolitics refers to the politics of death instead of life. Agamben asserts that life had always been under state control, what shifted with the advent of modernity was the extension of that control to death. Foucault in *Society Must be Defended*, however had already noted that in the business of "mak[ing] life," "the balance" between life and death for the state is "always tipped in favor of death." (239)

subject in a world that resists their presence and renders it non-presence. Insofar as spectrality is seen as a diegetic function of the novels with respect to protagonists, we can perhaps concur that Shukri is aiming to reformulate the post 9/11 Muslim writing that responds to the War on Terror. In portraying absent protagonists of his novels, Shukri turns to an exploration of what the event (War on Terror) has taken away from everydayness of the Muslim world. The Muslim experience is characterized by gaping absences that make sense only when read in reference to the imperialist project of modern Empire. The paper, therefore, through an exploration of Shukri's texts attempts to open new avenues in studies done on War on Terror and the Muslim experience therein.

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# Democratised Media in the Digital Age: John Grierson and Travails of Political Propaganda

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[http://ellids.com/archives/2021/02/4.2-Williams.pdf](http://ellids.com/archives/2021/02/4.2-Williams.pdf)

**Abstract |** The ideals behind creative freedom often come into conflict with the stark realities of financial interest. Commercial image-making is subject to numerous compromises based on the general practicalities of a project and the financial obligations that sponsorship imposes on the autonomy of the content producer. Comparing the studio-based and state-sponsored models of production with the relative accessibility of today's creative environment, this article will argue that whilst visual media production has invariably changed for the better in terms of representation, parallels still exist in how democratised media is subject to different levels of creative control. By examining John Grierson's cinema of social purpose in conjunction with non-specialist digital media, the theory and formal significance of Britain's Documentary Film Movement will be shown to harbour a contemporary resonance for the digital image-maker. In essence, the argument will examine the importance of immediacy and rapid expansion in film practice and intellectual spectatorship, and will further reveal the structural boundaries that explicitly and implicitly limit a creative's medium of communication. The conflicted way in which we consider a concept like freedom within the democratic state is exposed by the means by which we can distribute our images of said state. By broadly examining the formal, philosophical, and political analysis of the idealised state, democratised media will be defined as an imaginative practice inherently stimulated by the misrepresentative forces of idealism.

**Keywords |** Documentary, Propaganda, Idealism, Democracy, Freedom, Free Will, Digital Media, Neoliberalism, Abstraction, Nationalism, Ethics, John Grierson, Hegel, Chomsky, Steyerl, Cinema Studies

> There is of course no limit to the imagery possible to documentary cinema, for the simple reason that it can take-in all sorts of odd references which make the atmosphere more vivid and the setting more lyrical, references which consciously or subconsciously build an attitude to the scene. (Grierson, "Cutting Bench" 3)

The ideals behind creative freedom often come into conflict with the stark realities of financial interest. Any attempt at creating a commercial film is subject to numerous compromises based on the general practicalities of a project and the financial obligations that sponsorship forces onto the autonomy of the individual creative. Comparing studio-based and state-sponsored models of production to today's creative environment, visual media production has invariably changed for the better in terms of representation. Recording technology and editing software are highly accessible and integrated into a range of operating systems that vary dramatically in price. The raw materials of everyday life can be recorded for photo collages or videos posted on social media; short daily vlogs and comprehensive essays can be viewed online at any location with an unblocked signal, and events big and small can be witnessed as they happen across the globe via streaming services. Whilst recording quality differs in these devices, the fact remains that documenting immediate lived experience has never been easier. The structural boundaries of film distribution are challenged by the immediacy and portability of content creation on social media, where the previous reliance on a bureaucratic financial apparatus is liberated by the inherent local production methodology of content defined by individual image-makers. However, as with physical media, the complex economic relationships that characterise the potential profitability of digital image-making are not defined by a simple one-on-one interaction between the digital creative and their own content, but rather a wider web of association, whereby sponsors, parent companies, service providers, and even the audience enact some degree of censorship and stylisation upon the final product. What is seen and where it can be seen is currently a self-regulated decision at the behest of streaming companies. What these businesses can offer an artist in return for adherence to their malleable guidelines is dependent on the suitability and popularity of the artist's work. Furthermore, a content producer is also bound by the demands of their own audience, whose promotion of and access to the artist or production company provide another layer of marketing, whether it is by direct advertising on social media or through their encouragement of further engagement via comments sections or communication servers specifically created for fans. Essentially, the main feature differentiating digital media from physical is the immediacy with which personalised images can be filmed, edited, and transmitted to the world audience, and how those images can be engaged with just as swiftly.

If the British Documentary Movement[1] was chiefly involved in glorifying the importance of democracy, it is interesting to contrast and compare the theoretical grounding of the said movement with today's democratised media and the new freedoms it is afforded. This freedom is defined by concepts of free will, creative freedom, and the social resonance of rational thinking. It is with these concepts in mind that this article will scrutinise the political notions of idealistic phenomena in order to identify the importance of non-fiction cinema and visual record as sources of social engagement. This argument will present the philosophies that motivated Grierson as being essential to the continued development of an ethical approach to documentary. The conversation will study the film theory of Russian Formalism and engage in the analysis of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, particularly his understanding of the ethical society. The contemporary written works of Hito Steyerl and Noam Chomsky will be introduced in order to include modern issues relevant to democratic freedom, whether creative or political, into the argument. There will also be a consideration on abstraction within Griersonian film. The article will conclude with a discussion on whether or not we can consider Grierson's methodological model of filmmaking as an early outline of the ideals of contemporary neoliberalism, providing space for reviewing Grierson's idealism in a manner which does not pander entirely to the immaterial logic essential to the idealist philosophy. Considerations towards aesthetic representation in documentary will extend to the sociological importance of phenomenology and will conclude with a short discussion on the disparity between Grierson as an artist and Grierson as an individual. By perceiving these ideas in a form that clarifies and abstracts the concepts being discussed, the phenomenal experience of the outside world, image-making, and autobiography will be utilised to consider what the concept of the cinema of social purpose actually means when most individuals have a camera at hand. The responsibilities of a cinema of social purpose are chiefly based on its communicative potential, using the linguistic patterns developed in the experimentation of film rhetoric to argue for beneficial reform within the communities and industries that make up an ideal democratic state. Such experimentation can be expanded upon when the boundaries of formal invention are extended from a physical state to a digital one and where image production is made accessible to the members of a larger cross-section of society who do not specialise specifically in film production. As more individuals are offered the chance to communicate their local reality through film, the more comprehensive and complex our understanding of social purpose becomes.

The portability and simplification of today's recording technologies offer the image-maker a potential to showcase compartmentalised specialism through their creative projects. This is to say that the individual is offered the potential to integrate

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[1]The British Documentary Movement is the common name associated with numerous propaganda film units which were working in Britain in the 1930s and 40s. The chief aim of this movement was to use non-fiction film as a tool to educate audiences on issues of national and social import through creative visual media. These films would be supplementary tools used to improve the citizenry's understanding of their own society and economy, highlighting the importance of British industry and local ingenuity whilst also promoting Liberal values with regard to the welfare state. These films were screened in and outside cinemas, offering a subjectivity to urban and rural working class communities by dramatising their work and leisure experiences. John Grierson (1898–1972) is the most prominent figure linked with the movement.

their so-called "vision" into creative practice through a fluid form of practical engagement and theoretical thinking, one which is supported by digital appliances rather than the necessary assistance of specialised workers and specific pieces of equipment. The ease and speed with which applications can be downloaded to assist the user with most areas of film production and post-production, ranging from basic editing software to compositional programmes, offer a layered approach to image-making, whereby the impulse towards creativity in content creation can easily be satisfied. As such, a DIY-aesthetic can be granted to films created through a theory of necessity and availability, where the only limitations are that of the creative's imagination and the digital distribution services and app stores associated with their mobile operating system, such as IOS or Android. Whilst Grierson saw theatres as film consulates ("A Big Movie Idea" 7), today's mobile phones can be that and so much more. The key distinction between the films of the British Documentary Film Movement and digital media is the innovations in technology. The movement away from haptic sources of editing to distanced synthetic products has developed into an accessible approach to artistic production whereby the individual can record, compose, write, and edit the composite elements of their cinema on a machine that fits into the palm of their hand. What is important to note is that a smartphone that offers these tools provides a workspace that results in creative input and immediate communicative output.

Speed being a vital resource to the digital filmmaker's production methodology creates an interesting link to how early filmmakers theorised the importance of swiftly communicated sequences and neatly packaged ideas within film editing, presenting a clear sense of satisfaction being inherent to the prompt processing of media as well as the rapid spectacle of montage editing. In his text, "Montage as the Foundation of Cinematography," Lev Kuleshov describes early cinema's spectatorship in relation to the attention span of the average audience member, expressing how the pacing of a sequence determines a viewer's appreciation of the interrelation between the separate materials presented in a scene. He discusses this using the metaphor of a painted fence, and suggests that to recognise the significance of the assembly of the fence's colours, a painter could not separate the colours by miles but, rather, had to think in yards (129). This was developed further by Sergei Eisenstein through his intellectual approach to montage, demonstrated in such films as *Strike* (1925) and *Battleship Potemkin* (1926). The painted fence is an odd metaphor for Kuleshov to use, especially when considering this piece was written before the medium employed colour and was predominantly without synchronised sound. What it does articulate is the vivid response quick cuts elicit from an audience; his emphasis on the physical reaction elicited through this technique is made all the more obvious when he asks the reader to visualise a scene from an imagined film in which a man shoots himself (130–131). Comparing the uninterrupted theatrical shooting style of early pre-montage Russian cinema to the rapid-cutting of American film, the mental image Kuleshov asks us to create through these two different methodologies reveals the power of shot organisation, all within a sequence which ends with a gunshot to the head. Violent sequencing is revealed to be a potent weapon in the filmmaker's arsenal.

Grierson argued that the imaginative and suggestive potential of rapid editing is still susceptible to the dangers of an overly aesthetic beauty, one in which "we begin to

feel movement and pattern and rhythm as qualities so lovely in themselves that we can forget altogether about their relation to a story or a theme" ("Sound Lecture" 2). Another Russian Formalist director, Victor Turin, agrees with this sentiment: "Every film must be composed of a series of thought impulses, and action must serve only as a means of expressing these thought. What I might call the prosaic film with its dynamic of action is the very opposite of the film of poetic expression with its dynamic of thought" (7). Hence, sequencing is the foundation of mental engagement within sequential visual media, or at least with regard to the intellectual approach to early silent cinema. Dramatically speaking, the primacy in this structural approach to storytelling is explained by Grierson as the essential factor in his propaganda film technique, whereby the scale of a sequence must be utilised in such an order that the spectacle of mass movement communicates the story of the film being projected ("Propaganda Film" 40). This attempts to ensure that the audience views movement in a way that encourages their mental engagement with the subject onscreen without the need for individual thoughts to be focalised. Physiology substitutes psychology, yet the structural order in which this action is presented creates the potential for movement to represent a thought impulse, and create the internality within an image that, by itself, contains a purely surface level engagement. This act of directly perceiving an idea rather than intuiting it through long sustained thought creates an in-depth reading of the film's narrative, whereby the mimetic relationship between the audience and image switches physical engagement into mental engagement.

The story is the message in both fictional film and Grierson's documentary film, as his phenomenological approach to real labour is the dramatic reinterpretation of reality. Yet, whilst Turin separates "action" and "thought" as two different methodologies for filmmaking, essentially suggesting the prosaic quality of pure action is typified by a lack of imagination when compared to the poetic expression of intellectual cutting, Grierson's understanding of arrangement seems to find its motivation more from Hegel's sense of unity in opposition. In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), Hegel conveys that, "The distinction between thought and will is only that between a theoretical and a practical relation. They are not two separate faculties. The will is a special way of thinking; it is thought translating itself into reality; it is the impulse of thought to give itself reality" (21). One can understand Grierson's cinema of social purpose as articulating a very similar point, one in which the influence of the rapid editing style of the Russian Formalists can be better associated with the British Documentary Movement. As such, the audience engagement encouraged by filmic action essentially has to be tied to a socially purposive message, whereby the entertainment associated with an exciting sequence must also incite the audience to a process of willing an idealistic society into existence. For Grierson, no matter how memorable a sequence is in terms of its entertainment value, if a film fails to encourage the audience to consider the political relevance of a scenario, and how its resonance is articulated through the distinctive form in which it is presented, then he would constitute it a dramatic failure. Considering the connection between active and reactive approaches to thinking, what can be derived in particular from Hegel's statement is the groundwork for Grierson's argument that free will is attainable only through ethical participation in society. Societal duty is to be understood through a set of concentric circles, beginning with the wants of the individual before extending itself outwards towards the plural duty of family, immediate community and, at an even larger scale, the ideal of good society.

As such, the effects of active engagement with the physical world bear a trace of the soul's inner life, leading to a further argument on abstraction and the subjectivity found in the reflective nature of possession and ownership. In this philosophical framework, each has to tie their wants to the groups in which they participate, from their role as a member of a family to their involvement as a citizen of a community. Following this, the personal associations the individual makes with the phenomenal world are influenced by both internal and external forces. Conceiving an object is the act of relating oneself to that object, consequently replacing its oppositional value as something beyond the individual with a new understanding through the perception of it as an extension of the individual. An object described as universal is actually a reflection of a self-conscious mind willing a subjective definition into existence. This process of signification is not to say that any object can be randomly assigned a reflective meaning; Hegel understands free will as a form of rationality, informed by historical change and sensible reality. What it does suggest is that free will is fixed to content constructed by a constantly developing conception of the world rather than purely fictional leaps of the imagination by the individual. This rationale is assembled from both inner and outer sources of rationality, where "a man, who is implicitly rational, must create himself by working through and out of himself and by reconstructing himself within himself, before he can become also explicitly rational" (29). In short, Hegel states that "reality is the realisation of the free will [...] Right, therefore, is, in general, freedom as idea" (40).

In discussing the fundamental work by Russian filmmakers in the development of editorial theory, Grierson describes how the audience engages with the raw materials onscreen by relating to them on a physiological level. He states the excitement encouraged through montage is "the method of attaching detail to detail with appropriate emphasis here and appropriate joggings of the sub-conscious mind there" (*New Worlds* 22). In the words of Eisenstein, "we photograph the bumps, and the movie-goer feels them" ("Mass Movies" 1). Creatives edit the world around them to best express the message they wish to dispense, yet these productions are also subject to a process of synthesis influenced by the societal structures and natural realities of the said world as the creative attempts to order one's ideas into a substantial whole. A way in which this can be understood is in relation to the limitations of spectatorship. The idealism of this methodology is something which is placed into conflict with the practicality of assigning a silent film a single score for every single theatre. Put simply, Grierson made the claim that "I never in public saw the film I made" ("Sound Lecture" 3) due to factors such as musical directors ignoring the instructions he made for the scoring of his film. This statement comes from a 1934 lecture Grierson gave on the uses of sound in cinema, where he introduces his talk by maintaining, "As I have tried to emphasise, you are not in cinema dealing with a single or simple thing. You are dealing with half a hundred different cinemas and your technique (whether of sound or of silence) will vary with every one of them" (1). The statement should be read as a call for an organic approach to filmmaking as well as a warning of the practical issues one might fail to consider if one is too absorbed by the art to see the industry. In the production of commercial entertainment and state-sponsored propaganda, the individual is unable to have complete control over their own work if it is to benefit from the institution that funds their art and distributes their creation. Grierson's comment, therefore, also expresses an awareness of the many ways a film is susceptible to change due to formal innovation and cultural context; it highlights

practicalities of distribution as the screening venues and technology which define cinematic spectatorship and are not monolithic in nature.[2]

The visual products of democratised media and portable visual technology inherently present the many ways in which reality can be documented by the non-professional with the accessibility and malleability of high fidelity cameras on mobile phones. The commercial boundaries of early documentary cinema are problematised by such a development. This criticism is beyond the world of social media, online streaming, and independent filmmaking, and comes from a moment in time where the economic demands of film limited a visual storyteller's "ordinary freedom" to "spineless compromise" (Grierson, "Films and Industry" 12). The high density of available images online does counteract the distinct advantages a promotional budget has on making sure these films and photographs can actually reach their audience, yet at the same time it is this budget which creates severe expectation on the quality, formality, and shape of the product of filmic experimentation. Whilst the images produced on mobile technologies are still mediated interpretations of reality, they cross a line whereby the proximal qualities of personal experience take priority over the aesthetic obligation towards the financier. What might be considered poor quality in fictional cinema is in fact the signifier of authenticity within direct reportage, with democratised media attaining a degree of tactility closely associated with the aesthetic of sensory ethnography. Meticulous cinematography and artistically-minded aestheticism can abstract the potential for communicating a strong message in socially purposive media by prioritising artificial prettiness over the clarity of a film's argument. In short, the expectations an audience has for a multi-million dollar film production compared to an online vlog present a way in which we critically differentiate media through economic expectations.

Hito Steyerl argues that the faults found in audio-visual content associated with what she terms "the poor image" are, in fact, a means whereby material failure can reveal regressive hegemonies, presenting the capitalistic and cultural restraints created by technological perfectionism. An economy being imposed on perfect imagery marginalises the works of those who cannot achieve the high value assigned to high fidelity imagery. Steyerl explains this tension between finance and clarity by claiming that "poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images—their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement" (Steyerl).

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[2]Grierson's silent documentary debut *Drifters* (1929) highlights the issues that became apparent when screening a film deprived of this control. Without a system of synchronisation between sight and sound, whereby the playback of the recorded sounds as they were arranged could be as reliable as the playback of synthesised images, there was no dependable way of assuring an exact replication of the intended aural elements of a film beyond ownership of the screening venues. Even then, human error and the distancing afforded by separate technologies would still make this a difficult venture. This is not to say that sound-on-film was an entirely infallible development, but that the interlocking process provided by the married optical print meant that certain sounds would ideally be played at certain moments. Basil Wright articulates how unfortunate it was that *Drifters* was released just at the point of departure from silent to synchronised cinema, so that the orchestral score performed in grand theatres and the turntable score arranged in the smaller venues would be lost to posterity (Sussex 7). Fortunately, history has been kinder, with projects such as Jason Singh's live improvisational rescoring of the film (Cornerhouse) revealing the synthetic potential at the heart of Grierson's early attempt at filmmaking, proving how much of an active experience is still resonant in the picture today.

Steyerl's argument mentions the works of Humphrey Jennings, a prominent figure in the creation of the Mass-Observation movement,[3] who joined the General Post Office Film Unit (GPO) when it was reorganised and renamed the Crown Film Unit (Steyerl). Jennings' inclusion is not to signal his active participation in "the poor image" but, rather, he is introduced to discuss how the degradation and loss of old film print renders poor quality footage invisible within the economy of high quality imagery. The projection of images is a representation of the sociological boundaries found in the systems of finance in filmmaking, whereby aesthetic aberration becomes unprofitable deviancy. Expression is intrinsically related to capital in this case, auteurism providing a position in which the artist can present their purposive ideals, albeit indirectly through the conventions of populist cinema. Formal practice must reconcile with commercial influence in order to reach as wide an audience as possible. This resolution involves appealing to those mesmerising qualities of populism whilst engaging with the mental stimulation of visual and editorial experimentation. Steyerl notes the agitprop films of Russia as being part of the genealogy of "the poor image," even going as far as to link the audience engagement promoted by poor quality imagery as a development of Vertov's "visual bonds," a concept in which the workers of the world would unite through organisational media (Steyerl). The ease with which a digital image can be transmitted to a global audience presents universal interests in terms of what we film, how we film it, and the extent to which the technological and budgetary limitations of these projects communicate rather humbling notions of personhood. Genres and sub-genres of online content are formed by this expansive process, developing a need for new categories of media, whether it is finding a better descriptor to categorise a type of vlog or adapting our filmic language to achieve a level of inclusivity that will not dismiss minor cinema or outsider art found in this digital network. The unconventional eventually becomes conventional if the arena in which ideas are circulated becomes accessible to a larger cross-section of society. A bond is created by formal poverty, where mistakes, fragmentation, and degradation show a richness in human expression.

Returning the conversation to the earlier discussion on Hegel, this argument relates to the abstract rights of the individual, and how property, family, and social contract relate to the development of modernist principles. In arguing for the potential of a community's ethical life, Hegel expresses the constant development of rationality through the conflicts between personal freedoms and institutional reform (160). The disparity between abstract rights and ethical life arises from the distance between individual desires and the common good. What the development of new societies with new priorities aims to do is to rectify individualism and have free will become more closely associated with the needs of the commonality. A tension arises between subjectivity and objectivity here, or more directly, between the individual and the state. Civil society becomes the environment in which the individual is able to enact one's personal goals by participating in a project larger than oneself. What becomes of interest in this philosophy is that one must think externally in order to actualise one's own inner desires. Considering this relationship, it is also of note to examine how Hegel defines the

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[3]Mass-Observation was an independent research project founded in 1937 which aimed to record the day-to-day lives of the British working class by publishing and archiving diary entries written by a selection of volunteers. It held similar values to that found in Griersonian cinema, most prominently in its attempt to improve social policy by voicing the everyday concerns of the British people.

identity of the family unit by stating, "The family, as person, has its real external existence in property; and it is only when this property takes the form of capital that it becomes the embodiment of the substantial personality of the family" (169). From this quotation, it can be deduced that capital is identity, and that this transcends the personhood of the individuals it defines, consequently presenting free will as only being possible through a participatory relation within ethical society. However, corporate exploitation is a clear danger within the specific relationship between an individual and their labour. If a civil society is to be understood as an industrialised society, then it is imperative that both the individual and the corporations that comprise their community are united in achieving the same moral goals. Of course, in the context of this argument, the objective of the state is the actualisation of an ethical society. Much like the previous paragraph's discussion on the individual, the motivations of a corporation must become a synthesis of their internal wants and broader external needs, where individualism's draw towards profit must be re-evaluated in reference to the common good. Hegel directly mentions the necessity of the state monitoring corporate entities due to their tendency to prioritise self-sufficiency over communal goals (228). There are similarities to Hegel's societal principles and how "the poor image" rallies against individualistic impulses, Steyerl claims, "The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society. It merges art with life and science, blurring the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author. It insists upon its own imperfection, is popular but not consumerist, committed without becoming bureaucratic." Steyerl is aware that the spaces in which "imperfect cinema" can be broadcast are in a crisis of privatisation, with digital communication under constant threat of becoming another space of aesthetic censorship.

When comparing the idea of poor images alongside the financial and technological limitations of the EMB and GPO,[4] there are numerous ways in which the arguments of Steyerl and Grierson coalesce and contradict. Even in the above quote, the most obvious disparity is found in the clear eschewal of institutional support, whether through the studio system or state sponsorship. The EMB's principle aims were "scientific research, economic investigation and publicity" (BMJ 268), which Grierson aimed to promote through documentary that glorified what he described as "the new range of technological discovery, the new range of scientific discovery and the implications of scientific discovery" (Sussex 29). The data generated through these critical principles could be repurposed in new forms of media for public consumption, an idea Grierson associated in his last interview, with the positive prospect of health education taught at the most "primitive and primary levels" (25). He noted that a key aspect of sponsorship was the illustrative potential of visualising relationships, rather than the boundaries which might be enacted through the imposition of the loyalties between funding bodies and creative personnel (26). The tension between Steyerl's theory and state sponsorship is best expressed through Grierson's statement that "the artist will have to humble himself before the proper demands of the common people as the none-too-believing artists of the Renaissance once humbled themselves in the service of the commercial princes and church" ("The Seven Obstacles" 2322). There is a call for

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[4]The Empire Marketing Board Film Unit (EMB) and General Post Office Film Unit (GPO) were the two state-sponsored propaganda departments that Grierson headed during the late 1920s to the mid-30s.

social betterment within Grierson's work, but one that still requires institutional patronage. Furthermore, the criticisms of an economy of images present both figures as being keenly aware of the damaging effect of unjustified aesthetic beauty. Much like Grierson's consideration of film that aims merely to entertain through escapism as being a dramatic failure, Steyerl suggests technological perfectionism can create formal and textural homogeneity within cinema, where images are meaningless within their prettiness. Neither of these creatives intend to create postcard images, and thus must come to terms with the financial compromises they endure as a result of prioritising provocative mediation theory over the content abstraction of meticulous cinematography. Thus, the demonstrable profitability of high-budget cinema inadvertently forms a boundary in which audience expectations are inclined to prefer films that exist to entertain through profitable medium as opposed to the socially purposive models of Grierson and Steyerl. The participatory call for group work as an ideal for both figures is also of interest. Both attempt to transcend the boundaries set up by artistic censorship, whether it is Grierson's search for a financing system which allows for creative freedom in how it communicates an idea, or Steyerl's democratisation of imperfect media.

It must be stressed that the practical ideas of poor imagery would be entirely different for Steyerl and Grierson, with one dealing with the compression, distortion, and defragmentation of digital data and the other prioritising his theoretical ideals rather than the practicalities of actually documenting reality. This is not to say that these ideas do not interrelate, but that their temporal and material distance offer entirely new ways of reviewing their concepts. Considering Steyerl's conception of "the poor image," the use of post-production effects on footage which would be deemed unusable in the economy of perfect imagery relates to both the elitism of high quality visuality as well as the transformative capacity of the poor image. She states:

> The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming. (Steyerl)

In attempting to fix footage which, at a production stage, is deemed unfinished in its original state, this idea of a hierarchy in visual quality is within the very data of the final screened product of a film. The cosmetic enhancement of clips is often deemed necessary to the substantive content of a film. Rather than being distracting, it creates a form of perfectionism that, through its characterisation as a synthetic reinterpretation, becomes imperfect. Essentially, a preliminary impulse is altered to a new state of being, restructured so its practical failing becomes a closer representation of the filmmaker's ideal content. This imagined world is part of a process of problem-solving which aims to hide the mistakes made by the filmmaker, yet the visibility of this attempt to fix pre-arranged content is a vital aspect in the presentation of phenomenology on film. A subjective perspective of the world is not unlike the subjectivity of how any form of visual media represents our external reality, cinema being a medium which is chiefly representative as opposed to being a direct record of time and space. An opaque practice of digital editing is a noticeable alteration of natural reality or, to phrase it more

succinctly, a phenomenal perspective. Beyond these insular juxtapositions between practice and product, this idea of the phenomenal response to the outside world can be extended towards the sociological situation of the United States.

In making an argument that refers to digital media as a stage in the development of early documentary practice to a democratised form of self-expression, or at least a development to an imaginative communicative practice that has the potential to offer an equity to outsider perspectives, a sociolinguistic understanding of nationalism's relation to the citizenry and that citizenry's conception of statehood can further ascertain the dangers surrounding propagandistic phenomena. Idealism is a philosophy of ideas and, as such, functions by prioritising an internal truth over the general impossibility of truly crafting an objective understanding of external reality. To applaud the misrepresentations of filmic experimentation as a characteristic of a truly democratic practice one has to contend with the dangers of the false realities proposed by idealising the democratic state. Noam Chomsky's *Necessary Illusions* considers the political ramifications of imagined reality, examining the way in which the moral failings of Western industrial societies are hidden through institutional distraction. Often, Chomsky is questioning the biased reasoning of the US government and how it is motivated by the attempted maintenance of establishment forces and specialised classes (7–8), bringing the reader's attention to the way in which American democracy's moral focus is redirected from locally-defined fronts to democracy in foreign countries (11). The benefit of this criticism by the State on foreign political activity, and the implementation of active and indirect military involvement, is of course chiefly domestic. It is, with a sardonic tone prevalent, that Chomsky follows the democratic state's leaps of logic to their illogical conclusions, where his assessment of different forms of political hypocrisies reveal the rationale behind a ruling power's definition of a "crisis of democracy," (27) before taking this crisis to present a dissolution of language itself. To even call this illogical is questionable, as this illusionary practice can be viewed as less a perversion of constitutional doctrine, and more of American democracy's functioning as it was intended. It is a process in which Chomsky's personal frustrations come to the fore when listing these distortions of the truth. This textual personality does not diminish his analysis, but in fact presents the intrinsic link of abuses of power with abuses of language. Frequently, sentences are packed with layers of quotations that are being analysed in bracketed text that is placed in the middle of a different quotation and its corresponding analysis, often ending said sentences with a blithe or sarcastic commentary, questioning the indifference of this evidence to substantive truth. This style of commentary can be as dense as the above description suggests or as simple as finishing a discussion on the United States' "defence" of freedom in Nicaragua with a statement that questions "if words have meaning" at all (Chomsky 75). There is an element of sensory overload to this writing style that expresses the way in which national pride can entangle the rational senses by hiding the truth behind a necessity for overly elaborate explanation. This textual density is then followed by the revelation that often these sources are intentionally misdirecting the reader. Chomsky is employing the same frustrating tactics found in these political documents to emphasise the main point he is trying to make. Through omission and redirection, public opinion is influenced to adopt a nationalistic perspective thanks to the rescaling of consequence and upholding a "model" conception of democracy (107). Controlling the way a story plays out in the public consciousness is essentially an act of releasing selective evidence and

issuing bad faith arguments. Chomsky expresses this by arguing, "If the media, and the respectable intellectual community generally, are to serve their "societal purpose," such matters as these must be kept beyond the pale, remote from public awareness, and the massive evidence provided by the documentary record and evolving history must be consigned to dusty archives or marginal publications" (62).

This selectivity is as prevalent in the political bias behind communicative practice in media as it is in the quality of images presented to the public. In fact, this limited perspective is in some ways a development of what Grierson was attempting with his "drama of the doorstep," or it was at least partially related to the decidedly local productions founded by the GPO compared to the broader scope of the EMB. In an entirely negative development, the moral values assigned emphatically to local labour, and the British public's general preconception of global support as foreign interference, become factors which distort the influence international forces have on national projects. This entails that the tasks which are glorified through local documentary practice can undermine or render essential global relationships invisible, leading to the exploitation of developing countries' labour and indirectly encouraging xenophobic reactions to those abroad who provide a net benefit for the locality. The production of raw materials to be used outside the country from which they have been acquired is entirely for the benefit of Western Capitalism (98), and shapes a prevailing national pride through the omission of key components in the overall process. At a functional level, what occurs is similar to a grandfather clock, where the majority of the mechanisms required for the machine to function are hidden from view, but the pendulum and turning hands of the clock remain plainly visible and are conceived as the only truly necessary components in the telling of time. There is no sense of fulfilment beyond the obligation towards service, undermining the potential for a global network to encourage the free-flow of ideas and instead create a paternalist relationship which benefits only one of the parties and runs like clockwork. It is no coincidence here that Grierson's films are similarly characterised as having social purpose.

That is not to say that Grierson's ambition was limited to the exclusionary practice of national propaganda: his work promoting the Empire with *Song of Ceylon* (1934), and later influence in film units ranging from Canada to India, present an international scope to the local documentary. Newsreel series such as *Canada Carries On* (1940), *The World in Action* (1942), and his posthumous inclusion in the Indian documentary *Flashback* (1974) are a few examples of this global impact. What can be noted, however, is that the restriction of content to a specific doorstep can encourage an appeal to individualism founded upon a regressive nationalism, and even then, this international production can be subject to the certain beautified exoticisation Grierson criticised, as seen in *Song of Ceylon*. Omission and invisibility are thus ideas that can be conceived in terms of Hegel's ethical society, Steyerl's economy of quality, Chomsky's illusionary practice, and Grierson's local documentary. Artistic and institutional censorship are both founded on class-based ideologies, which present a potential to understand the uses of digital imagery within a fabricated political environment. Chomsky writes on the limitations of what can be expressed or imagined by the general public. Specialism is a problematic concept here, as the ideals of specialisation in the workplace relate to the ethical society rather than reality. Hegel presents the abstraction of labour as a process by which a worker is given

a specific skill within a broad process which only gains meaning when applied to the product that is the end result of all these separate processes coalescing. As such, an interdependent relationship between labourers becomes essential in any production line and concludes with the automation of the skilled worker's very specific mechanised process, achieved by the use of even more machinery (191). As discussed by Walter Lippmann and Chomsky, beyond manual labour the scientific specialists of "The Great Society" control the flow and mediation of ideas by justifying their own perspective by skewing quantitative data and selling it as objective fact. Lippmann claims:

> The more enlightened directing minds have called in experts who were trained, or had trained themselves, to make parts of this Great Society intelligible to those who manage it. These men are known by all kinds of names, as statisticians, accountants, auditors, industrial counsellors, engineers of many species, scientific managers, personnel administrators, research men, "scientists," and sometimes just as plain private secretaries. They have brought with them each a jargon of his own, as well as filing cabinets, card catalogues, graphs, loose-leaf contraptions, and above all the perfectly sound ideal of an executive who sits before a flat-top desk, one sheet of typewritten paper before him, and decides on matters of policy presented in a form ready for his rejection or approval. ("Public Opinion" 370)

Making society "intelligible" is not the same as objective fact, much as the glorification of industry in Grierson's cinema was dramatised reality. Considering the limitations of perspective found in specialism, whether it is in the abstraction of labour or the mediation of government specialisation, it is of interest that Grierson is certain in the failure of Hegel's "ethical life." He notes, "We are a rabble of individual particles neither combining in common purposes nor sharing in those larger enjoyments which only common understanding can bring […] There are specialist organisations of central and local Government, but none can decentralise enough and attach themselves really intimately to the public life" ("Church and Cinema" 10). This assessment is the result of Grierson's attempt at selling the importance of a film unit to the Church of England, so there is a degree of hyperbole in this statement. Yet, what is being asserted here encapsulates the utopian vision Grierson argued for, with films of local reality created by the local film specialists, whereby specialisation in creative media should be used as a means by which to communicate the concerns of a locality rather than solely those of national significance. In the films of the EMB and GPO, industrial processes and manual labour were edited together in order to establish the importance of each worker's abstracted labour, unifying mass movements in a way that would dwell on the dramatic motion and visual patterns of industry, rather than directly portraying the internal life of each individual worker. This objective to bring vitality to the mechanism of work is shown in an odd personal letter Grierson wrote to his mother, where he discusses his trip to the stockyards of Chicago. After an anti-Semitic description of a Rabbi slaughtering sheep for Kosher produce, he writes of what he saw at the slaughterhouses, expressing "the process was dull, - because it's so mechanical and so murderous, but colourful – colourful! I was shown too little of the tinned meat process to have much faith in it" ("December 9th" 6). The relationship between one's faith in a process and how visual materials influence this belief is fascinating for a number of reasons. It harks back to the theological concerns that dominate Grierson's ideas, whereby his philosophical, political,

and sociological influences have all been in aid of his fundamentally Christian outlook on life. Most importantly, it is the direct statement on why he prioritises the visual medium of cinema as a tool by which to communicate the necessity of different industries within Britain. Grierson claims one way to document reality was by being a painter, (*I Remember, I Remember* 01:52–01:54) and the use of the word "colourful" to describe something as mechanised as tinning meat reiterates the meaning of Kuleshov's fence metaphor as relating to the vibrant possibilities of carefully structured media.

Bill Nichols described the Griersonian cinematic strategy as invoking that same call for social purpose as John F. Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" (605), claiming that "the modern state had to find ways to enact popular, compelling representations of the state's policies and programs. Such enactments engage its members in ritual, participatory acts of citizenship. Documentary film practice became one such form of ritual participation" (604). Nichols' argument is centred on the modernist avant-garde influences of the British Documentary Film Movement, and considers the ways in which the political concerns of Grierson's state-sponsored propaganda were at odds with the aesthetic influences of his particular form of realist film. Whilst the avant-garde was often highly critical of the ritualistic processes of state participation, Grierson's documentary aimed to unify the disparate institutions and industries of Britain in order to encourage ethical participation for the common good. This form of documentary was relatively sentimental and sanitised compared with the modernist movement, whose fragmentary style aimed at exposing these very qualities as vacuous at the best of times, and dangerous at the worst. Within that previously mentioned description of the rabbi slaughtering sheep, Grierson reveals the tense divergence between the principal aims of his documentary and that of modernism. His description literally invokes the power of ritual and creates an image charged with a satanic quality, aided by stereotyping and racist caricature. He writes:

> The old Jew looked a queer figure in the shambles, with nothing but blood-red niggers dancing around him, like a stray figure in a Fifteenth-century Hell. The sheep were led in, as ought to be in any decent Inferno, by a horrid figure – a goat! It led innocents along in capital style, and had a real way with it every time it came to the threshold of the shambles. A sort of coaxing way like they say the vamps have. ("December 9th" 6)

The difference in the positivity, simplicity, and heroism that supposedly characterised Grierson's ideal vision of film and this passage presents a stark contrast between how we view him as a creative and as an individual. There is a clear sense here that this is meant to be written as both shocking and humorous, mixing the seriousness found in his highly charged religious fervour and hellish imagery with some colloquial punchlines, and a vampiric goat! It presents the rabbi in a propagandistic fascistic foil, where he is both a figure of comic derision as well as one to be feared. Consequently, if it is to be understood that the documentarian as orator constructs identity by presenting normalised conceptions of citizenship, then regarding Grierson's clear definition of the Jewish faith as a deviant culture makes this role a worryingly dangerous one.

Understanding how Grierson actually defined abstraction helps to comprehend Nichols' reading in more depth. In *I Remember, I Remember* (1968), a documentary in

which Grierson introduces a number of films he worked on in some capacity throughout his career, he states:

> Don't be frightened by the word abstract, abstract just means order, just means patterns. Everything you put into order is put into pattern and we live by putting things into order and patterns: in the school; the kitchen; the field; the factory; the streets; the highways; the railroad tracks; the car parks; the supermarkets. Everywhere. Why we live in patterns and by patterns. (*I Remember, I Remember* 33:14–33:37)

Whilst Nichols' discussion on the abstract finds that the techniques employed by avant-garde filmmakers often aimed to destabilise the normalised preconceptions of society in order to construct new "representations of a shared secular reality" (594), Grierson's statement suggests his use of montage created a positivist impression for the audience in which violent editing actually offered a counter-intuitive sense of reassurance for the "status quo" (600). Abstraction for Grierson relates to an imaginative means of refocusing the immensity of the world into brief snippets of information. To unravel the complexity of national identity, let alone a globalised economy, the parallelism and juxtaposition afforded by cinema's foundation in editorial practice enabled a filmmaker to represent numerous perspectives, locations, and objects of interest at a speed by which webs of association could be made comprehensible to an average audience. As the above quotation explains, democratic society functions through the interconnection of the personal with the communal, and the abstraction of these separate referents of information can be made whole when made to interact with one another through montage.

To call Grierson's employment of modernist aesthetics merely surface level would be a far too simplistic reading, but Nichols' definition of the role of the Griersonian orator helps to elaborate the importance of this stylistic mimicry. As a guide, the documentarian was there to lead the public to moral and political certainty (599), helping them understand their environment in a way that just so happened to fall in line with the beliefs of those financing that documentary. Abstraction was just another means by which to communicate an ideal, utilising it as part of the visual and structural practice cinema could engage with as a rhetorical medium. Good intentions can only go so far, and the deception inherent within propaganda makes it clear why abstraction became a prominent technique in the fabrication of cinematic reality. As explained by John Cunningham, the impulse to film the local activities of the British working class in the 30s was not free from the prejudices of elitism, claiming, "Ordinary life, particularly the lives of the working class, became of interest and concern in the 1930s. There was a desire, primarily among the more liberal/leftist middle class to 'go out' and discover this other Britain and if this sounds like some kind of anthropological excursion into the 'heart of darkness' then, for some, this was precisely what it was" (158). In both Grierson and Lippmann's writings, this labouring public has been presented as ignorant or easily mislead, or even both. The sensationalism of film in this context is presented in an outline 1935 talk by John Skeaping, who appeals to the image of hypnotism by opening with claims that cinema has been regularly accused of inciting violence against others and the self. Skeaping's talk presented the case for a Film Unit for Labour propaganda. He states:

> Culture, except as a pastime for the wealthy, has no place in Tory philosophy, for a truly cultivated and enlightened community would never tolerate the indignities inherent in the present social system. It is for this very reason that the Cinema is used on a large scale to mislead and befog the minds of the people by the creation of the emotional atmosphere that hides the truth and blinds so many to their true interests.

This idea again draws the conversation back to Hegel's ethical society, and the suggestion that social betterment is a process of constant improvement. Skeaping argues for film to be considered as a progressive art-form here, articulating the strength of Britain's propagandistic practice, and proposing documentary cinema as the means by which the Labour party could garner more support by better communicating with the mass public. This movement gained very little momentum within the party, to the point where it becomes understandable why Grierson's work required his employment within the Conservative government, whose creative use of mass media was an enticing characteristic in forging a home base for the British Documentary Movement (Beveridge 99).

The outline for this particular talk by Skeaping highlights a number of films which he used as part of this visual lecture, including *Housing Problems* (1935), and notes that both Grierson and Robert J. Flaherty[5] attended the event. Whilst Grierson's political agnosticism is a keen point of debate for scholars, there is a sense of Skeaping simultaneously applauding Grierson's work as a purveyor of documentary whilst also shaming his participation in the Conservative agenda. *Housing Problems* bears the aesthetic imprint of Ruby Grierson rather than that of her brother, so to use this film to open the discussion is in itself a telling choice. Skeaping's talk confirms a trend found in a number of documents surrounding the Labour party's understanding of cinema, quoting the Greek philosopher Heraclitus' maxim, "the eyes are more exact witnesses than the ears" (Skeaping). Whilst Skeaping notes the limitations of this quote as a consequence of the advent of synchronised sound and the approaching developments in colour film, the empiricism at the heart of this statement relates to the universality of film as a communicative medium. The same quote appears again in a 1936 circular on the question of Labour cinema propaganda written by the party secretary James Middleton and the Trades Union Congress general secretary Walter Citrine. In it, they claim that propaganda film "can create bias against which neither reason nor rhetoric can prevail. It can persuade and be understood by the ignorant as well as by the educated, for it works through the combined media of sight and sound, appealing to those senses which are common property of nearly everybody – men, women and children alike." Grierson discusses this in his unpublished typescript *Cinema of Purpose*, claiming this persuasive quality in propaganda is stimulated by the visual properties in cinema. Grierson wrote likewise of

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[5]Robert J. Flaherty (1884–1951) was an ethnographic documentarian who was known for his dramatised depictions of native communities which are more accurately described as works of docu-fiction, due in part to his tendency to stage scenarios for his subjects to perform. He filmed groups as diverse as Canadian Inuks, Samoan islanders and Aran fishermen. Both he and Grierson are often given the title 'father of documentary.' Interestingly enough, Flaherty worked with Grierson at the EMB in the early 1930s, a partnership which unceremoniously ended due to Flaherty's highly stylised form of documentary requiring budgets which were impractical and unavailable to the film unit. Footage Flaherty shot during his brief period with the film unit was repurposed and can be found in a number of EMB productions.

film that "the evidence of the eyes appeals very directly to the mind […] it can exploit increasingly the fool's regard for the under-side of the earth" (*New Worlds* 7–8). It is useful to consider this allusion to Heraclitus as a possible point of contention in Grierson's idealism, one that puts up the evidential value of reality against the constructed fictions of cinema. That understanding of fabrication as the main source of content in political propaganda is fundamentally centred on the selective transference of data, both literal and sensorial, and the exploitation of the emotional value of narrative.

Cunningham's reading of the avant-garde in Griersonian cinema differs slightly to Nichols, as he considers the financial and cultural movements outside film culture that influenced the changing methodologies of British propaganda. Vitally, both readings are cognisant of the contradictory role Grierson had in both the EMB and GPO film units, where his enthusiasm for artistic experimentation was limited by his obligation to make an acceptable product for a predominantly Conservative government (Cunningham 154). Within this obligation is a form of phenomenal thinking which requires the moulding of reality towards the ideals of the financier. This is not to say that Grierson is not self-conscious of this hypocrisy, as in his own writing he criticises newsreel film of "mistaking the phenomenon for the thing in itself" ("Course of Realism" 201). Grierson wanted the excitement of fictional film to be endowed with the educational qualities of the visual lesson, so that the audience would engage with a relationship to the cinema which was both understanding of its artifice whilst simultaneously indulging in its form. This phenomenal reinterpretation of reality was to carry with it the inciting message of social purpose, one which was emphasised through the formal playfulness found in that casting of cinema as an invention of the phenomenal rather than a noumenal perspective on actuality. For Grierson, representative works of non-fiction film were to deliver a simple message that was explicitly in support of their sponsors whilst also harbouring an implicit call towards national unity by rendering the lives of the working class and the industry of Britain in the engaging formal practices of cinematic phenomena.

Essentially, realist film was presented with a task of salesmanship, casting John Grierson as the "father of the commercial" (Graef as qtd. in Neely 28) rather than that of documentary. In a 1932 memorandum by the TUC and Federation of British Industries, the declaration that "film is a most powerful factor for National publicity and has a direct reaction on industrial and commercial relationships between nations […] both directly and indirectly goods are advertised in film" (FBI and TUC) expresses a similar ideology to Grierson's cinema as sales pitch, and the internationalist, if inherently imperialist, outlook that characterised the EMB. It is a lifelong belief in the potential for all film to advertise goods for a nation's benefit, one that Grierson even mentions in his final interview with Elizabeth Sussex, conducted in February 1972 (26). This puts Grierson in that indeterminate political position, where his methodology and social purpose falls in line with Skeaping's left-wing leaning ideology, yet his film production is in aid of a predominantly Conservative agenda. Grierson claimed that "documentary is at once a critique of propaganda and a practice of it" ("Documentary Idea" 84). It is no wonder that within the Tory party this political inconsistency had many members opposing the financing of the "'Bolsheviks' of the GPO film unit" (Cunningham 154).

Grierson wanted to be both the financier and the authoritarian, interested in the ways that the auteur had the slim potential to escape the limitations of homogenous

cinema through an economic freedom earned via aesthetic popularity. The interrelationship between idealism and escapism in this conception of cinema is juxtaposed by the director's financial obligation towards artistically and politically conservative institutions. There is a sense of that corporate greed found in populist politics as being related to the role of the auteurist, sacrificing the ethical society for the abstract goods of self-fulfilment. Yet, this self-fulfilment can also be in aid of social progress, or at least the supposed progressive ideals of the creative in question.

In considering what Hegel meant by free will as a form of fixed content, it is startling to see Chomsky in 2017 state, "'freedom' means a subordination to the decisions of concentrated, unaccountable, private power" (qtd. in Lydon). For all that argument for the participatory relationship between the individual and society as the ultimate conception of free will in Hegel's work, here we have "freedom" as the passive acceptance of the prioritisation of corporate interests over social betterment. With the collapse of centrist parties due to the sociological stagnation found in neoliberalism, where the free market is more important than free thought, considering Grierson's work as a sales pitch communicated through cinematic experimentation's idealistic interpretation of reality offers the possibility of viewing his films as early indicators of the principles of neoliberalism. In Lippmann's *The Good Society* (1937), the indeterminate nature of philosophical freedom is directly examined when he posits:

> The demand that men be subordinated and submerged in the mass is easily mistaken for the ideal of a fellowship of free individuals in which the human personality realizes some of its noblest possibilities. It is not always easy to distinguish between the patriotism of the collectivist who sacrifices the individual and the patriotism of the free men who sacrifice themselves voluntarily. (386)

The conflict between liberty and security creates the diverging understanding of freedom as a social model of active engagement compared to one of passive acceptance. As with Chomsky's criticisms of the democratic state that operates on illusionary practices, the fabricating ideals of Grierson's work find their basis in upholding a conception of democracy that functions through these deceptive intentions.

One also has to go beyond the functionality of film practice and extend the discussion to how Grierson viewed the purpose of the state. Ian Aitken expresses this by claiming that Grierson understood that "the true function of the State was to regulate community life in accordance with the fundamental principle of full free individual development" (27). We can view this as a naively idealist conception of governmental practice, which echoes that plausible deniability intrinsic to an idealist philosophy, but there is also a sense of this characteristically simplistic Griersonian definition as being the seedbed for a certain form of neoliberalism. Plausible deniability is used here to invoke that impossibility of complete definition within idealism found in the Kantian conception of the movement, as well as that open-endedness to the Hegelian quest for the ethical society, but it is also alluding to deregulation in free-market economies. Whilst suggesting Grierson was advocating purely for free enterprise would create a categorically false assessment, especially considering his tendency to view the invasive practices of the state as essential to making society comprehensible for the citizenry (37–38), there is room to argue that Aitken's definition here marks the beginning of a negative

development in this optimistic understanding of the relationship between local and central authorities with the citizen. Aitken claims Grierson's documentary offered a conversation between authority and citizenry that only allowed one member to communicate to the other (194). This hierarchy is fundamental to the process of invasiveness that John Gray portrays as being essential to the neoliberal project (Gray), notably describing the conclusions of this model as making the state "omnipresent." It is also in this one-way discussion that this regulation of community life for individual development can be perversely reformed into regulation by deregulating the free market. Individual development, then, refers to toxic individualism within business. Gray emphasises that defining neoliberalism is a difficult task due to the political and ideological inconsistencies of its supporters. Gray's statement that "neoliberalism and social democracy are not entirely separate political projects; they are dialectically related, the latter being a kind of synthesis of the contradictions of the former" (Gray) offers a strong platform for developing this argument. These contradictory unities propose the necessity for moral guidance within this model of the body politic, a point that is most clearly articulated in the financial crisis of the late noughties. It is within this failure to rectify this ethical dilemma that the conservative extremism of today finds its historical reflection in the Great Depression of the thirties.

By positing Grierson's role in visual media as a key figure in the development of advertising, rather than direct reportage, one has to consider the clear neoliberal parallels drawn here. Whilst his intentions were focused on social justice, and his conception of the state opposed to the principles of free-market economics ("Education" 265), it is undeniable that within the salesmanship of the Griersonian documentary is a financial element that follows the same unifying logic found in neoliberal models of government. Tellingly, he spoke of the "unexploited gold mine" of the audience, the potential to "sell Importance" and documentary as "the business of making the world good-looking enough to live in" ("Atmosphere" 2026; *New Worlds* 3; 16). This form of engagement was supportive of a welfare state, which further complicates this reading, but his interpretation of the relationship between cinema and the audience as being based on a sociological economy represents a trend in Grierson's theory and practice that touches on the origins of neoliberal polity. In an unpublished text titled *Eyes of Democracy*, Grierson defines this contradictory position rather well: "I have had to be a creative worker and a civil servant and a promoter and an organiser and a critic and a teacher of youth; and although I hate finance and know nothing about it, I have had to find the millions, often from people I dared not tell fully what I was after lest it would seem pretentious" (qtd. in Hardy 126). Grierson considers here that national publicity is "the face we present to the world" and the "'personality' factor in Salesmanship" ("Teach the World" 1). How capital is acquired is altogether unimportant in Grierson's eyes, as long as the money is put to the use of producing socially purposive media. Whilst he claims ignorance on the actual subject of finance, the freedom with which he attempts to achieve the budgetary requirements of his propaganda does express aspirations towards free-market ethics within financing.

And yet, Grierson's propaganda was formally constructed to encourage an active engagement with the world order, further problematising whether we can view these documentaries as progressive or regressive in their overall moral objective. Asking such

a question requires a similar expansion of academic scope as presented in Hegel's concentric circles, whereby those individual abstract needs have to relate rationally to the pluralistic goals of community in order to create the prospect of an ethical society. In attempting to distinguish the theory from the individual one is led into further complications, and a subjective maze is created in which phenomenology marks the individual introductions and conclusions of each academic path before revealing that there can be a new route for each new researcher. Perhaps it is appropriate to reconsider Grierson's emphasis on heroism as a key component in successful filmmaking, in order to clarify how his creative methodology relates to his indeterminate political ideology.

Thomas Carlyle, whom Grierson criticised as an antiquated philosopher for the modernist age, wrote of heroes that "all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world" (3). This statement is not so far off Hegel's own opinions on thought and will, but Hegel argues that what he classifies as heroes are essential for the establishment of the state, but are rendered useless during the maintenance of the status quo, arguing that all acts of heroism are related to the reconstruction of normalised models of morality, mentality and law (93). What does this mean with regard to Grierson's propaganda, which aims to uphold the status quo of the government it promotes but endows its subjects with the physiology of heroic figures rather than expressing the psychology of the individual? Therein lies the critical point in which Grierson can be praised and derided: the refusal to be limited by the reality of a situation, even when making his objective goal the dramatisation of reality for *his* interpretation of ethical ends. No matter what the original context or intended meaning was of an aesthetic movement, philosopher or financier, Grierson planned to mould the world around himself in order to achieve his goals. Art, words, and theories were all susceptible to the laws of phenomenon, and the limitations of the ethical documentarian were based on the boundaries of creativity. The capacities for imagination in the documentary movement had to be endless in order to energise the realist film with the physiological and psychological responses needed to push the audience into social engagement.

The nature of conflict as a cohering force in Grierson's practice is reflective of the struggle found in rationalising the numerous opposing factors that define his methodology, philosophy, and worldview. One tends to return to the importance of visualisation in the Documentary Film Movement, as the complexities of such ideas as objective success and moral value lead the researcher into a subjective analysis that is naturally simplified through the understanding of realist film as a positive medium by which to engage visually with society. With all the political, sociological, and theoretical thinking that surrounds Grierson's writing and work, there is an almost unbearable stretch between his interests, one which he recognises as being a strain on the focus of his project ("December 31st" 12). However, the way in which one considers general concepts of freedom and finance, before applying them to the commercial boundaries of popular film, leads the conversation back into questions directly related to theory and practice. It seems pertinent to the argument that in Grierson's final interview (Sussex 26–7) the very nature of freedom within the financial constraints of aesthetic ideals and uncreative funding is discussed for an extended period of time. In this section, Grierson expresses the strength

that could be found in local production, and the inherent need to decentralise institutions in areas of mass production. Within his proposed financial model of small units funded internally by local business, there is a sense of attempting to achieve the democratisation of media that became impossible within the boundaries of governmental propaganda production. This statement appears to be a conscious effort to establish a documentary movement that focuses on public interest by being entirely produced by public institutions, rather than attempting to maintain its sense of social purpose even within the privatised developments of economic liberalism.

Freedom is financial obligation within the seventh art, and it is with these boundaries in mind that Grierson points out how the mentality for rapid expansion in audience numbers and profit tends to produce essential restrictions on creativity. He claims, "I don't think we've arrived at an aesthetic of freedom because there's no aesthetic of freedom in the sense that you're always subject to the laws of harmony. You're always subject to the laws of expression […]. So the idea of being free of the necessary restraints of art, I mean that's out of the question" (qtd. in Sussex 28). As a natural element in the development of film media, this realistic attitude towards the cost of filmmaking is a blank spot in that consistently idealistic approach to cinema found in most of Grierson's theory. The excitement of creativity and the potential to undertake one's social duty whilst also fulfilling the role of an artist is undoubtedly caught up in the laws of harmony, which within economic liberalism are the laws of commerce. Here, we are to understand these laws as fixed content. This point exemplifies another case in which phenomena comes into the fray, as to be truly representative of the world becomes an impossibility not just out of the practicalities of distanced sensual engagement, but the further reinterpretation of actuality founded on the principles of financial obligation. These philosophical and financial understandings of film are in conflict, with Andrew Blaikie assessing "the specific role of the documentarian was to access the underlying meaning behind superficial appearances, albeit that this would mean using the phenomenal to understand it. Images were thus used in a formalist, symbolic style to convey key themes" (62). As this abstraction is the superficial attempt to render the world through a superficial medium, it is now no wonder that further conflict is borne out of this logical inconsistency. Early narrative cinema exists out of this inconsistency, and as Lippmann points out, "Our popular taste is to have the drama originate in a setting realistic enough to make identification plausible and to have it terminate in a setting romantic enough to be desirable, but not so romantic as to be inconceivable. In between the beginning and the end the canons are liberal, but the true beginning and the happy ending are landmarks" (*Public Opinion* 166). That simplification of actual matter is there in the Griersonian methodology too, where complexity can only arise once a simple and conceivable base has been set up by the film. It is a certain form of clarity within a fabricated environment, one that is identifiably real but not directly representative of proximal reality. While there are clear differences in how intimately fiction film and Grierson's documentary came to this proximal reality, embracing the phenomenal perspective of the camera meant that even when the raw materials on film were on location, they still obeyed the laws of editorial reconstruction.

Plausibility and authenticity are two different concepts, and this paper has considered the ways in which certain freedoms, whether creative or based on societal

privileges, reflect the social elements on display within non-fiction film. This phenomenal experience of reality is found in the formal practice of montage, the imperfect media of Steyerl, the political postulations of Lippmann and Chomsky, and the local documentary of Grierson. The conflict between liberty and security creates the diverging understanding of freedom as a social model of active engagement compared to one of passive acceptance. As with Chomsky's criticisms of the democratic state that operates on illusionary practices, the fabricating ideals of Grierson's work find their basis in upholding a conception of democracy that functions through these deceptive intentions. By considering this in relation to contemporary visual media, perhaps we can see how Grierson's dream of decentralised film production is somewhat similar to the digital culture of today, yet it is still subsumed by the economic and political boundaries that challenged his entire sociological project. Whether we are discussing material or immaterial media, creative freedoms will always come into conflict with the means of their distribution.

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# Data Enlightenment and its Discontents: Free Will and Myth of Human Authority in the Age of Big Data

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**Abstract |** New technologies of data-extraction, such as Big Data, collect information from online users and connect them in order to trace behavioural patterns and predict future marketing choices. Online activity is becoming more essential than ever before despite growing concerns about privacy. Personalised advertisements based on prediction not only manipulate online users, but they even create their needs and desires by influencing their decision-making process and choices, thus, facilitating the growth of online capitalism. Is there even a small place for human free will in the age of Big Data? This paper examines the possibility for agency as it is framed in the age of Big Data, and contends that although technology is the offspring of humanity's alleged scientific rationality, it paradoxically questions the myth of man's mastery over himself and the world. By exposing humankind's self-contradictions and vulnerability to control, Big Data dismantles and simultaneously continues anthropocentric myths regarding human reason and supremacy, while promoting new forms of surveillance and state control.

**Keywords |** Big Data, Agency, Free Will, Technology, Data-Mining, Surveillance, Digital Panopticon, Online Capitalism, Enlightenment

These days it is almost impossible to follow the speed of technological progress. New devices and services designed to improve daily life appear in the market every day. These advancements in computer science facilitate communication, consumption, and self-improvement in unprecedented ways. They enhance the speed and quality of research in fields like medicine, astronomy, and climate change, but they also have negative implications concerning the manipulation and privacy of individual users. At the end of the 20th century, Gilles Deleuze's vision of control societies describes but the foundations of the world today. He perceives a movement away from the disciplinary society illustrated by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish.* Docile bodies and sites of confinement give way to new forms of control within "[…] a system of varying geometry whose language is digital" (Deleuze 178). This new kind of society is dominated by digital codes, which allow or inhibit access to information. In this context, according to Deleuze, individuals and masses are reduced to "'dividual' matter to be controlled" or, in other words, to data (182).

Almost thirty years after the publication of Deleuze's *Negotiations*, it can be observed that life is indeed dominated and, by extension, controlled by the digital. This kind of exploitation presupposes an understanding of the human as something that can be reduced to data, to information that can be analysed and used for marketing and surveillance purposes. On this basis, Byung-Chul Han contends that the world has moved from biopolitics, characteristic of Foucault's disciplinary society, to psychopolitics, the interference with the subject's psychic processes (25). Neoliberalism, as the latest mutation of capitalism, turns freedom into a new form of subjugation, no longer under the guise of regulation and conditioning but as digital exploitation of personal information shared online (1; 5; 9). The internet has thus become an indispensable tool in the 21st century. Although it began "as a medium of boundless liberty," today it is a new form of panopticism, a site of "total control and surveillance," exercised through the collection of user data (8). At the centre of these functions is capital increase. As the world's new master, capital "generates needs of its own; [and] mistakenly we perceive these needs as if they belong to us" (7). This false assumption, however, is reached after undergoing digital manipulation. Neoliberal power, Han insists, is invisible and pleasing instead of forbidding, and it operates through positive emotions and desire, making individuals dependent on it (14). This is achieved through Big Data, the collection and analysis of large sets of data, which read into users' behavioural patterns and use them for prediction. As the world becomes more and more digitalised, it is almost impossible to hide from the watchful eye of algorithms.

It is impossible to talk about the modern world without referring to the Internet. Its use has spread to the fields of education, social services, politics, marketing, and others, while at the same time it has become one of the most subtle yet effective mediums

of control. This evolution of purpose has taken the Internet far from its original purpose. Introduced in the 1960s as a means of distance communication, the Internet connected scientists from different places and facilitated their collaboration as well as the fast exchange of information. At this early stage, the exchange of data between a computer and a server remained anonymous (Peacock 5). This was before the employment of browser cookies. These first appeared in 1994, "when Lou Montulli assembled a piece of code in hypertext transfer protocol language [...] called the HTTP cookie" (5). The implementation of cookies changed the Internet drastically as regards its use and secure connectivity. In the second decade of the 21st century, the majority of websites have a cookies policy which users need to agree to in order to access information. Strangely, however, most individuals are oblivious to the nature of cookies and to what such an agreement entails. A cookie is "a small text file [...] that a website [places] on a visitor's computer" (Turow 55). This file is constituted by a number of codes, which can be used to identify the user and the clicks they made while visiting the website. Upon the user's return to the website from the particular computer, the browser recognises and decodes the information on the cookie. This includes the user's past activity, such as previous purchases and even items they might have been interested in simply by clicking on them (55). This explains why cookies have become so fundamental to online advertising and marketing. They allow companies to collect information and shape their business according to users' needs, thus laying the foundations for the personalisation of ads.

However, not all websites require the user's permission to place cookies on their computer. This has created anxiety about user privacy and online security, not only in relation to digital transactions, but also for the dissemination of personal information. Consequently, although cookies have enhanced the efficiency of advertising, they have also led to the decline of secure online communication, since marketers perceive them as means of learning more about individuals without them knowingly giving information. Opposition to cookies has so far come to no avail. Instead, they have even evolved to 'evercookies,' which "[…] continuously track online activity, are independent of the software used, and cannot be deleted" (Peacock 7). Cookies, then, have become one of the most prominent tracking methods on the Internet.

The development of more advanced algorithms has given rise to a relatively new technological phenomenon, which has taken web tracking to unprecedented depths. Big Data is defined as "high-volume, high-velocity and high-variety information assets that demand cost-effective, innovative forms of information processing for enhanced insight and decision making" (qtd. in Baruh and Propescu 581). According to boyd and Crawford, Big Data depends on the interplay between technology, analysis, and mythology. Algorithms collect and analyse data with increased accuracy, so that they can identify patterns in user behaviour and make suggestions accordingly, on the assumption that the knowledge they have collected is objective (boyd and Crawford 663). The neutrality of these large data sets allows for their interdisciplinary use, from fields such as politics to medicine and criminology.[1] Thus, although it is understood that Big Data

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[1] The implementation of data sets constitutes a new strategy for tracing and preventing crime. Algorithms collect personal information which is then linked to behavioural patterns and personality traits associated with criminal behaviour (Cf. Nikolas Rose).

can offer new insights in science, it is also perceived as a potential threat to privacy and freedom at the service of state control over individuals.

The growing power of Big Data has sparked concern regarding privacy and agency, as users are forbidden access to most websites unless they accept their cookies policies. This results in the collection of personal information of users and subsequent personalised ads following them around different websites. In this context, the present paper examines the concept of free will as it is problematized in the age of Big Data. It investigates the ways in which data-mining and prediction, especially for marketing purposes, affect the decision-making process and undermine user agency by serving personalised ads and information, thus limiting options and manipulating selection. This study will use free will and agency interchangeably, following the most widely accepted definition that understands free will as the occasion when it is up to the subject to "choose from an array of alternative possibilities" so that "the origin or source of [their] choices and actions is in [themselves] and not in anyone or anything else over which [they] have no control" (Kane 5). This process of free choice and action is "based on reflection [...] making sense of the world so as to act in it" (Couldry 891). The model of free will problematised in this study situates itself in the centuries-long debate regarding the existence and nature of free will, especially in relation to determinism. The paper aims to show that, by hindering agency, Big Data questions the myth of man's mastery over himself and nature, an idea established in the Enlightenment. By exposing humanity's self-contradictory response and subjection to its own technologies of control, a new Enlightenment of "data-driven knowledge" (Han 58) dismantles and at the same time, paradoxically, continues anthropocentric myths constructed during the Age of Reason, and passed onto the next generations to the point where they are perceived as inherent truths.

New systems of knowledge and power arise, governed by the belief that everything and indeed everyone can be quantified, measured, and turned into data. This process is called "datafication," meaning the transformation of what was previously thought of as unquantifiable aspects of life into data (Kennedy et al. 1). Through this lens, everyday activities are reduced to data streams. The self does not escape this trend. Data collection produces a digital replica of the individual, which can be observed and analysed independently of the actual person (Baruh and Popescu 581). This replica of the self is but an assemblage of data gathered from multiple websites visited by the individual. These include the user's social background, location, relationships, and activities. As a result, access to personal information has generated new ways to monitor citizens. Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon has assumed a new, digital form. The Digital or Electronic Panopticon as the new invisible and limitless means of surveillance collects and matches data on individuals in order to create an artificial version of their personality (Lyon 69). Categorising users, by extension, allows for the identification of collective patterns of behaviour as well as the needs and interests of the masses. This information is then used for government administration and law compliance (Fox 265). What can be inferred from this is that even though data sets are neutral, their analysis and implementation by marketing companies and governmental institutes serve a capitalist ideology, whose aim is to control humans on both an individual and a collective level.

As the internet is increasingly being used for marketing purposes, methods of data collection, also known as data-mining, are being utilised at the service of capitalism. In

a world where citizens are being turned into consumers (Han 10), Big Data has become an indispensable tool for targeting individuals with what is understood to be, based on their digital profile, their needs and desires. As Turow observes, in exchange for access to information, companies place cookies on the user's computer and track their online activity throughout different websites, which then allows them to infer the individual's lifestyle and consumer intentions (105). It is not just marketing websites that are involved in this process. Informative websites use cookies and clicks for tracking, but the greatest source of data today is social media. Social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, offer free services in return for user data. This data is then sold to companies which target individuals with personalised ads (Bartlett 12). This becomes possible with the use of predictive algorithms which analyse user data and make predictions about future behaviour (Palmas 347). Thus, thanks to Big Data, prediction and personalisation have become the most effective tools for controlling consumer activity.

The problem of user agency begins from the very first moment an individual goes online. From that moment on, their activity is watched as it falls within the digital gaze of the new Panopticon. No online move escapes it. All the clicks and searches a user makes are stored (Han 61), which means that no step of online activity can be lost or deleted. This includes posts on the social media. Whether they are kept or deleted by their owner, their existence as data can always be accessed by companies and used in order to obtain user information. However, the majority of users are not always "aware of all the multiple uses, profits, and other gains that come from the information they have posted," especially since the publicity of data does not connote permission for free use (boyd and Crawford 673). Although websites create the illusion that users are still in control of their information and activity, they have in fact lost control from the moment they go online. There is no option to limit the extraction of data or use the Internet incognito. The extent to which users are conscious of their online activity also shapes their relationship to the so-called technological unconscious, meaning infrastructures comprising of patterns, predispositions, and responses of individuals. The recording of "user's responses and interactions reveal more and more about her predispositions," thus enhancing "the possibility of surveillance" (Hayles 119). Yet, it is questionable whether users are conscious of the information that can be exacted from their online activity.

Despite the increase in privacy complaints, the use of the Internet is certainly not diminishing. On the contrary, anxiety about privacy and online activity seem to be growing parallel to each other. Although more and more websites inform users about their cookies policy, which should mean that they are raising awareness of the extraction of user information, the activity of individuals and the sharing of information online is flourishing relentlessly. A "privacy paradox" can be identified, therefore, in the incompatibility between the online behaviour of users today and their ardent privacy concerns (Baruh and Propescu 587). If users are informed that their data will be stored and used, and nevertheless agree to it, then they also become responsible for data extraction. However, as the majority of social services and everyday life activities today require at least some involvement with the digital world, it becomes more or less inevitable for citizens to sacrifice, or better to sell, personal information in order to be functional and have access to services. Convenience is prioritised over privacy, inasmuch as there is basically no other option (Peacock 4). Most commonly, users are given the option either to agree to policies that store their information and track their activity, or

they are denied access to websites. They do not have the freedom to negotiate the terms or choose between alternatives (8). Web tracking technologies have advanced to the extent that Internet users have no choice but to bear with them. This is a case where logic of consent becomes dubious, as individuals do not truly have a choice: they can either agree to the terms or fail to function adequately in today's increasingly technological society.

The thoughts and motives that drive individuals to decisions are one of the major interests of advertising and marketing companies, and Big Data is providing them with fresh insights into these mental processes. On the assumption that everything can be quantified, decisions made by users are turned into "factual states" (Han 12), meaning data can be mined and analysed by algorithms in order to make predictions about future economic opportunities. Decision-making has been turned into a science for companies, who use data to understand and manipulate marketing behaviour. They build on the theory of human malleability according to which behaviour is the result of external stimuli (Bartlett 13). Big Data is the key to success. Data-mining, matching, and analysis produces a digital replica of users, which then allows algorithms to observe patterns and identify probabilities about future action on both individual and mass level. Han contends that this digital version of users is possibly more accurate than their own constructed self-image (62). This may be the case because data-mining technologies, by following the clicks and the time users spend on particular websites, gain access to mental processes and spontaneous interests about which individuals are unconscious. It is this digital spectre of individuals that with the help of Big Data becomes available to marketing companies, which then target consumers with personalised websites and ads (Baruh and Propescu 582). In fact, personalisation involves even news, entertainment, and general information (Turow 118). If what a user sees online is determined by capitalist ideology and the individual's digital categorisation, which is out of their control, then their agency is jeopardised. The users' ability and indeed their right at self-definition and control of their digital and social identity are compromised by Big Data and sorting methods that serve capitalism. Users become identified with their past activity. How does this complicate the future?

Personalisation and prediction are the most subtle and shrewd tools for the online exploitation of consumers. According to Hayles, the biggest part of human behaviour is not conscious (66). Big Data, however, has managed to access its unconscious elements. It can capture "micro-actions that elude detection by the waking mind" as well as "collective patterns of behaviour" which make "the collective unconscious" itself "accessible" (Han 65). Big Data's ability to read desires, which users themselves are unaware of, opens up space for psychopolitical exploitation and control on individual as well as mass level. Based on a user's data, companies make predictions about future behaviour, and personalise ads and websites in order to make this future behaviour a reality. To this end, personalised ads, for instance, use language that has been previously used by the user so that it gives an impression of authenticity (Bartlett 29). Unlike humans, data streams do not forget. By storing information, which users are not conscious of or have forgotten, corporations end up having better knowledge of users than users do themselves (Palmas 348). Furthermore, Big Data-based marketing, by playing on unconscious processes, interferes with mental operations and manipulates decision-making in ways that could be "faster than free will" (Han 63). The smarter

predictive algorithms become, the deeper this invention goes. Although personalised ads do not compel the user to click on them, their constant appearance across a variety of websites affects thought and action in devious, unconscious ways. As a result, users consent to suggestions on offer without checking them cognitively (Berry 145). If the user was not interested in a particular item beforehand, then a case could be made that they were tricked into being interested. Thus, these "recommendation systems" do not "only detect preferences, but also construct them" (Baruh and Propescu 589), thereby depriving users of agency and even of control over their own thoughts and actions. Algorithms take the place of agency, and make the users' decisions for them. Freedom of choice is substituted by selection from suggested items (Han 15). Consequently, the lack of alternatives and the manipulation of action by outside forces jeopardise the nature and even the existence of free will.

In the age of Big Data, the agency of users is thus overshadowed by determinism and its incompatibility with true free will. According to determinism, it is necessity that motivates an individual's actions, inasmuch as there are no other possibilities and it could not be otherwise. The source of will and, by extension, of action is not in the individual, and this is the case in the digital world as well. A user's thoughts and actions are guided by external stimuli, and they are determined by spontaneous and even unconscious decisions encouraged by the capitalist system. The origin of their behaviour can be traced back to their digital replica and online marketing manipulation. However, it may not be possible to completely deny moral responsibility since it is their earlier online choices and actions that determine their future manipulation. Thereafter, running into a vicious circle of jeopardised agency, the development of individuals is falling into the hands of corporations, and users are turning into their digital shadows, guided by a new god: Big Data.

The technological achievements of the 21st century are products of a long history of thought, whose roots can be traced back to the Enlightenment. The Age of Reason, as it was also called, claimed a place in history as "the advance of thought" that "aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1). To this end, it promoted scepticism towards religion, tradition, and all kinds of superstition, and sought to dissociate belief from knowledge. To know meant to enquire into the observable world and liberate the mind from the chains of fantasy. The goal of this philosophical movement, therefore, was "the disenchantment of the world" (1). The new forms of empirical knowledge that arose would then allow humans to establish their dominance over nature and replace the gods they had rejected. As masters of nature, however, humans would also have to become masters of themselves, and of other people (Berry 94). The dream of the Enlightenment has been realised in the modern era, albeit with complications. These include the concepts of self-exploitation and self-optimisation, identified by Han, which characterise citizens today (6; 30). Caught in a loop of compulsive self-control and self-betterment, humans lose touch with impulse and, by extension, with their free will as they always strive towards the goal of becoming masters of themselves. On a larger scale, new technologies of surveillance serve the purpose of keeping individuals on track and under the control of corporations and the state. Han argues that the 21st century can be perceived as a second Enlightenment, an era when knowledge is defined as data (58). However, given the new systems of coercion and the jeopardy of free will discussed in the previous sections, one ought to ask, "how

does the project of enlightened autonomy and freedom become instead a reality of radical heteronomy and domination?" (Berry 102).

Technology in the modern age has created new and unprecedented possibilities for knowledge. Its project is based on the empirical developments of science that sprang during the Enlightenment. Empiricism, in fact, laid the foundations for the quantification and measurement of everything in nature, although it failed to predict that one day this would include humans. Centuries later, humans "define themselves [...] as things, statistical elements" (Horkheimer and Adorno 21). The rise of the capitalist system transformed the principles of the Enlightenment so that they would serve its own ends, and the ramifications of this procedure can be observed in the mechanisms of the modern world. Knowledge is power and has no boundaries. Therefore, if "technology is the essence of this knowledge" today, and its interest is utility, it can be used for the sole purpose of producing capital (2). Indeed, human capital is at stake in the digital era, when the self becomes a commodity sold online in exchange for information and free services. Thought itself, as argued earlier, becomes objectified, reduced to data that can be observed, analysed, and used for particular ends. Thinking, Horkheimer maintains, "has been reduced to the level of industrial processes [...] made part and parcel of production" (qtd. in Berry 24). A paradoxical difference thus arises between the first and the second Enlightenment, although the latter is the offspring of the former, since human reason laid the foundations for scientific and technological advancement. Following the Enlightenment's principle that whatever cannot be turned into numbers is an illusion (Horkheimer and Adorno 4), the age of Big Data turns even the self into numbers, which, however, goes against another Enlightenment principle—human authority. Agency itself is resolved into data, which makes freedom of choice an illusion too. A knowledge and power imbalance emerges, as knowledge is no longer the object of humans but of the technological mechanisms they have created (23). Individuals are therefore conditioned to think within the confines of computational systems (Berry 104), which then analyse their mental processes. As a result, the anthropocentrism of the Enlightenment is being deconstructed from within.

The purpose of the Age of Reason was to liberate humanity from superstition and metaphysics, but since then it has been observed that the Enlightenment itself was caught in myth. Despite the disenchantment of the world that came about with the rise of empirical science, individuals and their relationships fell under the spell of rationalisation (Horkheimer and Adorno 21). This is true in the modern day as well, when more and more citizens of all ages become infatuated with technology, especially with the Internet, which is a scientific invention, thereby also a by-product of human reason. However, the most fundamental of myths of the Enlightenment is the one regarding human authority and sovereignty. The possibility of controlling the world went from the hands of god to the hands of man, the possessor of reason. The mind no longer needs god, for it has its own sovereignty and creativity, and through knowledge it is capable of making and manipulating all things (Horkheimer and Adorno 6). However, in the digital age, it is humanity that is manipulated by the offspring of its thought and science. In fact, domination by technology goes so far that free will itself is at stake. It has long been believed that agency is the source of authority that allows humans to dominate the world. This is humanity's "founding myth" (Bartlett 31). Without it, humans would no longer be in power. What is paradoxical is that humans are losing their agency and authority to

technology, which is itself a product of the tradition that places humanity at the centre of the world. In this light, the second Enlightenment reproduces and, at the same time, contradicts the principles of the first Enlightenment.

What can be inferred is that humans are in fact much different to what the age of Enlightenment imagined them to be. Passive submission to the workings of Big Data, and to the economic and political interests it serves, shows that "we bear little resemblance to the idealised, rational beings imagined by the Enlightenment philosophers" (Pentland 88). The way in which algorithms manage to manipulate the mind by appealing to its unconscious operations shows that humans are not in control of the processes within themselves as much as was once believed. Conceptualising individuals as agents was an anthropocentric myth, which was also politically encouraged in order to serve the interests of the state (Hayles 77). It could be suggested that this illusion was created in order to mislead the masses and thus control them in more subtle, invisible ways, as is indeed happening in the digital age. The continued usage of technology by online users, in spite of the known privacy risks, demonstrates that despite its rationalisation, the human world remains paradoxical and indeed inert (Horkheimer and Adorno 98). Thus, the deconstruction of the idea of human authority helps demolish the barriers built by anthropocentrism, and at the same time it emerges from within a system that jeopardises free will and imposes new forms of coercion.

Regardless of the dissolution of the anthropocentric myth and the odd kind of equality between species that emerges, the oppressive implications of Big Data utilisation should not be overlooked. These technologies do not only guide society's consumption choices, but they also encourage the establishment of consumerism and material insatiability as dominant ideologies of life. Big Data's tendency to sort users into categories may also sow the seeds of new forms of racial profiling based on an individual's online activity. Furthermore, the rising use of algorithms for the implementation of tasks usually undertaken by individuals not only puts humans in a position of ever increasing passivity and submission, but also leads to the decline of their mental capabilities. Hayles gives the example of GPS navigation and the atrophy of the human capacity for orientation (125). For centuries the enemy of the state has been the thinking subject. In the 21st century, the state is winning. With the help of Big Data, neoliberalism has trapped its subjects in a loop of unending self-optimisation, as citizens perceive themselves as projects that always need improvement (Han 1). To stop and think is not an option in this spiral of compulsion that finally humbles individuals to absolute docility. The concept of freedom is fading, and it will not be long before it becomes only a memory instead of a living ideal.

However, though the purpose of structures is to regulate and control people and their agency, human subjects can "act against, as well as within them" and become agents "in conditions not of their own making" (Kennedy et al. 2). Big Data sorts individuals into categories without taking into consideration the factor of difference and divergence. It fails to identify the uniqueness in individuals, namely the exceptional aspects of the self that escape standard categorisation and which have the power to transform the future. According to Han, such an individual would be "a modern-day heretic" and "a figure of resistance," inasmuch as they would exist outside the digital network of control and thus thrive on the ability to choose freely (75; 76). The possibility for agency, therefore, can emerge not in spite of the malleability of humankind but because of it, as it constitutes a

process of subject development. Furthermore, Big Data has provided new insights into a multitude of areas, including medicine and climate change—two of the most central concerns of the 21ˢᵗ century. If considered for its essence rather than for its commodity value, information does not by default negate individual sovereignty (Peacock 4). It is not too late for collective oppression to be turned into meaningful collective cooperation in a manner that benefits not only humankind but the entire world itself. Thanks to the abundance of information today, it is possible to create "*knowing* rather than *known* publics" (Kennedy et al. 5).
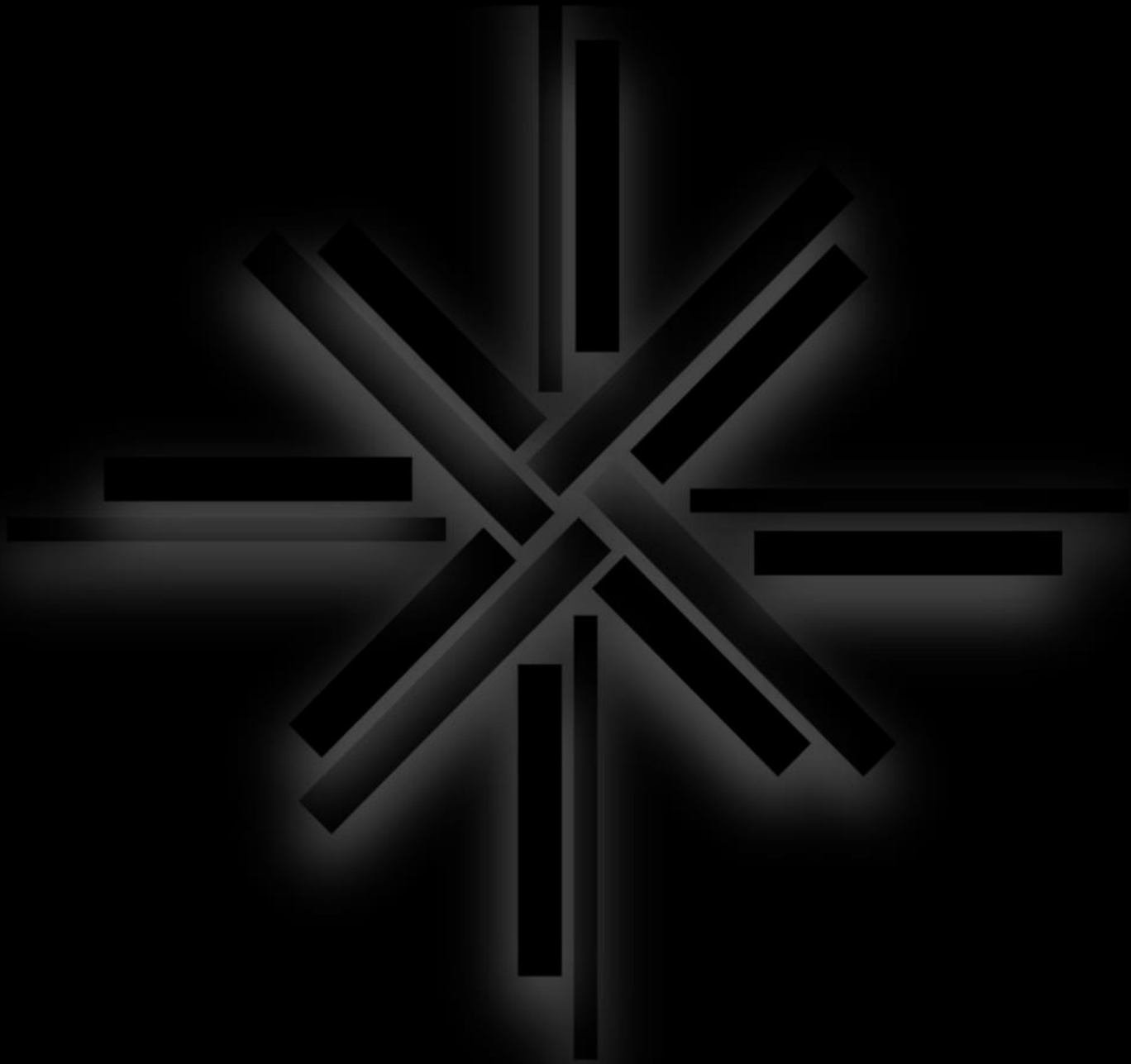
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