

Early Television and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*

New Technology and Flawed Power

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*There may come a time... when we shall have 'smellyvision' and 'tastyvision'.
When we are able to broadcast so that all the senses are catered for, we will
live in a world which no one has yet dreamt about.*

A. M. Low, *Daily News*, 30 Dec 1926, quoted in Burns 1998: 207

By contrast with the many explorations detailing how modernism relates to radio, to telegraphy, telephony or cinema, modernism rarely finds itself being glued to television. Specialist histories of the development of televisual technology and the associated industries abound (Aldridge 2012; Burns 1998; Darian-Smith and Turnbull 2012; Evans 2010); but the cultural myths of television generally concern its post-war embodiments, and the attendant critical and theoretical discourses have been predominantly post-war constructions. These myths and discourses have tended also to centre on America, history being written by the victors, even though (or because) America – while spearheading technical developments – was, in the 1930s, slow to establish public broadcasting companies, compared with Europeans, where techno-military rivalry and the threat of war spurred on development. A consequence of this bias in cultural history has been an occlusion of the cultural responses to television's development during the interwar years. For television was in fact far more advanced than is commonly thought and discourses about it far more widespread. The London Department store Selfridges had a 'radio and television department' in 1929. When Baird and the BBC teamed up to transmit programmes experimentally in 1930, it was widely reported (BBC Documentary 1976). On 3 June 1931 Baird successfully transmitted the Derby – the first outside broadcast. The German service

televised the Berlin Olympics of 1936. The BBC began regular programmes on 2 November 1936, so in 1937, George VIII's coronation was broadcast. By 1 September 1939, the day on which the BBC interrupted transmission because of the impending war, some 19,000 sets had been sold in the UK. It is interesting to compare these figures with the USA where 5000 sets were in use in 1946, nearly a million in 1948 and 10 million in 1950 (Fang 1997: 156–157). That the long dreamt of possibility of transmitting live images as well as live voices over large distances had become a reality was of huge public interest. The war closed down development in Europe; it has also caused us to be divorced from television's pre-war embodiments.

These events and the broad range of responses form a vital if somewhat marginal context for the 'high' modernism in the 1930s. For it did not simply coincide with high modernism, nor was the interest one-way. Pirandello's formally experimental *The Man with the Flower in His Mouth*, proved suitable, being a minimalist three hander, for early experiments transmitting television. Over the three years of BBC's transmission before the start of the war, some 326 plays were broadcast, including T. S. Eliot's highbrow *Murder in the Cathedral* which was thought appropriate for the new medium, and aired in 1937. One of the first documentaries ever shown on BBC television, in November 1936, called 'Cover to Cover', sponsored by the National Book Council, featured interviews with T. S. Eliot, Julian Huxley, Somerset Maugham and Rebecca West (BFI database). The range of speakers indicates concerns about highbrow and middlebrow literature that are now being examined in Modernist studies. John Piper gave talks on London Galleries (*The Times*, Wednesday, 10 February 1937); Paul Nash gave commentaries on art. There were formalist experiments – especially in dance and drama, such as 'Fugue for Four Cameras' arranged by Anthony Tudor, and a masque based on *The Eve of St Agnes*, broadcast transmitted in October 1937. TV was not a threat to cultural life, whether literary or intellectual, but promoted both, and even in the 1930s was playing a role in the development of the concept of the public intellectual. The cultural reaction to television itself was as established a phenomenon as TV itself.

This paper will examine a selection of cultural responses to TV in the interwar period as a context for James Joyce's engagement with television in *Finnegans Wake* during the late 1930s. The selection registers, for the most part, anxieties about the military context of television in a world of increasing international tensions. Joyce's engagement is well known – at least amongst Joyceans – occurring in a particular section known as 'How Buckley Shot the Russian General'. This was, for Donald Theall, 'one of the first fiction scenes in literary history involving

people watching TV in a bar-room' (Theall 1997: 66). Although it may have been the first fictional representation, the presence of a TV in a bar didn't require a miraculous leap of imagination on Joyce's part. His vision was coinciding with actual consumer patterns of the period, as the following journal item indicates: 'Among recent purchasers of television receivers are large numbers of owners of licensed premises who are finding them a profitable attraction. It is stated that this class are at present the largest purchasers and that the number of receivers in public houses now exceeds those in the large departmental stores.' (TSW 1937). I will identify three roles, which I believe Joyce plays: the accommodating sceptic, the accidental prophet, and the detached geek. In all three, Joyce responds to questions, which the possibilities of television were raising about the nature of the human, and the power and value of this new technology.

Joyce's sceptical response is towards the way the invention of TV was interpreted magically, providing an excuse for spiritualist concepts of the human; what Jeffrey Sconce diagnosed as a 'collective fantasy of telepresence' (Sconce 2000: 6). Just as 'telegraphy' gave new impulses to fantasies of 'telekinesis' (first usage according to the OED, 1890), so 'television' gave impulses to related fantasies of 'teleportation' (first usage 1931). As we will see, science fictions adapted the dramatic new transformations and transportation of images and turned them into melodramatic transformations of matter – human or otherwise. Such adaptations exploited the potential for violence in both technology and communication, and tended to demonize both in the process. Joyce, exploiting these transportations of television towards teleportation, of materialist science towards *unheimlich* spiritualism, was not particularly ahead of his time, but he did so in pantomimic ways that distinguish him from both technophobic demonization and spiritualized technophilia.

The prophetic response of Joyce's came in imagining what TV might be used for: we see a horse race and a battle scene, which are predictable enough, and in fact Baird had already transmitted the Derby, and the BBC had transmitted a boxing match. But we also witness in Joyce's vaudeville a live televised public confession. Before the nineteenth century was over, H. G. Wells, always quick on the uptake, had already imagined what TV might show, and the form its display might take. In his novel *When the Sleeper Wakes*, vast public halls display enormous screens, known as 'Babble Machines', which relay live up-to-the-minute news, though Wells makes it clear they relay misinformation, 'counter suggestions in the cause of law and order' (Wells 1899: 234). Rather than the rise and fall of economic fortunes, Joyce pictures the rise and fall of the moral fortunes of international celebrities. In doing this, Joyce was pre-empting the

dystopian world as projected by Orwell some ten years later, and the real world as mediated by Oprah Winfrey some 60 years later. Joyce's prophetic fusion of 'confession' and television was determined by a pre-existing narrative structure in *Finnegans Wake* where a human – and the Human – is continually on trial, cross-examined, sometimes defending himself, at other times confessing, elsewhere getting off scot-free. In addition, Joyce was responding, I would suggest, to another dramatic piece of news at the time – the show trials in Stalin's Soviet Russia, which unfolded from 1936 to 1938 and in which, amongst others, military leaders – Russian Generals, that is – made high-profile public confessions. The third set of these – in 1938 – was, indeed, filmed, and widely distributed. Joyce could see the power of television as a propaganda tool for the State and as a PR tool for individuals.

Yet another response of Joyce's is the geek response, which involved becoming deeply versed in the actual technology of television. It is true, as Rice says, that Joyce associates TV with violence – but anxiety about the violent power of this technology is also curtailed by a satirical sense of its limits and inevitable failings. What results is a refusal of the paranoia that will dominate conceptions of, and discussions about, TV – paranoia about its effects on individuals, and about its exploitation in the hands of power. Technology may be an extension of the human and it may extend the human, but as such, it extends outwards from human failings into new kinds of error. Dystopias are built on fears of evil omnipotent forces, which extend themselves through new media – whether in the form of Huxley's hynopedia and television or Orwell's telescreen (Huxley 1932; Orwell 1949). The absence of dystopia in *Finnegans Wake* is a sign that Joyce is sceptical of such omnipotence.

Whilst Joyce's engagement has in fact received considerable critical attention, that attention has not been plugged into modernist studies of media. It has tended to stay exclusively within the Joycean enclave (with the important exception of Marshall McLuhan) or has not been integrated with other cultural responses (with the exception of T. J. Rice's recent work). As David Hayman's genetic approach details, Joyce's incorporation of developments in television began in 1927 and bloomed in 1937, as he was bringing the book's composition to a close, in 1937, and finally composing the long-planned climactic section, central to the book, about an assassination of a Russian leader (Hayman 2007: 275–277). The initial incorporation of television coincided with the development of a certain critical *ressentiment* against Wyndham Lewis on Joyce's part which, in turn, led through satire to the discovery of a particular voice – that of a boastful, arrogant but compromised intellectual – modelled on the critical style of Lewis. In the

1920s, Lewis had been a drinking companion of Joyce's in Paris, but in 1927 Lewis published a swingeing attack on Joyce's 'time-obsession' in his *Time and Western Man* (renamed in the *Wake*, 'Spice and Westend Women' (Joyce 2012: 292.06)). The voice in the *Wake* issues from one Professor Jones (the Welsh surname indicating Lewis's Welsh background) who at one point dismisses the views of rival 'Professors' lacking the power he has as a result of the new technology, the development of which he seems to be overseeing:

looking through at these accidents with the faroscope of television, (this nightlife instrument needs still some subtractional betterment in the readjustment of the more refrangible angles to the squeals of his hypothesis on the outer tin sides), I can easily believe heartily in my own most spacious immensity as my ownhouse and microbmost cosm when I am reassured by ratio that the cube of my volumes is to the surfaces of their subjects as the sphericity of these globes (...) is to the feracity of Fairynelly's vacuum. (Summer 1927. First draft of 1.6 section 2, simplified. (47473–207, JJA 47, 122; Joyce 2012: 150.32–151.07))

A translation of this might read

looking at all this ill-formed rubbish of life, with my powerful technology, the 'faroscope of television' (which does still need some work), it's easy for me to believe in how immense I am when, proportionally speaking, the volume of my work compared to the surface of its subjects, is like comparing the size of my testicles to those of the castrati Farinelli.

The proportion of something to nothing produces infinity; the volume of his ego is infinite, fills all space. Technology gives to humans this belief in being divine. This first allusion to TV in *Finnegans Wake* then is to the mechanical method being promoted at that time by John Logie Baird. Television is being framed by the speaker as a scopic attribute of imperial power, something that will help embody the will to conquer space, a drive that Joyce associated with Wyndham Lewis.

More evidence of Joyce's interest occurs in the early months of 1931, when Joyce was preparing notes for the Night Games chapter, by reading the second edition of George Trobridge's *Life of Emanuel Swedenborg* (1912). He took several notes from Chapter XV headed 'Signs of Seership', which provides copious examples of Swedenborg's ability to converse with the spirits of the dead. One of these notes reads '["television"]' (VI.B. 33, 172 (f)). The editors of the Buffalo notebooks interpret this as a gloss on Swedenborg as a seer. '[]' is the sign for Shem, the twin brother of Shaun, his equal and opposite rival and, on rare occasions, partner. Shaun is a type associated with Professor Jones, the

speaker of the passage already quoted, whereas Shem is at this point associated with Swedenborg. Both intriguingly have now been associated with television. But where Shaun, as Jones, had *possessed* a television, Shem is embodied *as* a television – a seer who is able to see far away events; events, even, of another world. Television is being associated with different but perhaps equal and opposite kinds of power, in both its worldly-material and also mystical-spiritual forms. This note is not transferred into *Finnegans Wake*, but it does indicate that Joyce was continuing to keep abreast of developments in television and the ever-increasing quantity of discourses that attended them. Since the BBC had begun transmitting in September 1929, five days a week for half an hour, it was much in the news. But there were also connections being made between TV, magic and psychical research (Andriopoulos 2005). The note, moreover, does not merely indicate an association but points to a full identification: Shem *is* a television. Such metonymic identification produces metaphors of the human that transform our sense of the human, just as, for instance, at another point of the text, a narrator wistfully announces: ‘When I’m dreaming back like that I begins to see we’re only all telescopes’ (295.10–12), as if the very capacity for memory, bringing distant things close to mind, is such that it makes us resemble the power of telescopes. In II.3, HCE, the father of Shem and Shaun will similarly be identified with a radio. Joyce’s constant play with (at least) double meanings invites such metaphorical identification. The character Taff is described as having a ‘grinner set’ (348.33) – an allusion to his set of teeth. But it is also an allusion to a new ‘set’ on which you can see people grinning: so Taff’s teeth are a TV and the TV is Taff’s teeth. Through metaphor, conceptions of the new technology and the human keep swapping places.

In the mid-1930s, when revising the sheets of *transition* in which episodes of *Finnegans Wake* had already been appearing, Joyce made an addition to the third chapter (I.3), in which television provides a gloss on the ‘ear/eye’ binary, a binary that operates throughout the book and is projected onto Shem versus Shaun, music versus painting and Joyce versus Lewis. The context for the revision is as follows:

Arthor of our doyne. Our eyes demand their turn. Let them be seen!

(Joyce 1927: 34)

Before the first assertive plea here for vision (after ‘Doyne’), Joyce inserted the following sentence: ‘Television kills telephony in brothers’ broil’ (47472–229 and 52.18). This resembles a newspaper headline, enforcing our eyes’ engagement; but at the same time its alliterative form calls on the attention of our ears. Joyce

seems to be prophetically conjuring a somewhat typical domestic altercation in which one brother, watching television, wants the other, who is speaking on the phone, to shut up. Either one technology gains the upper hand over the other (the conversation is cut short and the phone put back on its receiver, so watching the TV show can continue), or, through metonymy, we actually have one brother killing the other. Alternatively, reading it literally and in the context of a history of media arts, visual culture destroys aural culture. If this is the case, then our own reading – which combines ear and eye – ironically qualifies this very news. In any case, the revision is preparing the ground for a stronger link between television and conflict, which will take place in II.3 and is the centrepiece of our discussion.

The story tells of how Buckley, an Irish sniper in the Crimean War, once upon a time, while on duty, caught in his sights an enemy, and no ordinary enemy, but one of the Russian's Generals. Though it was his duty to shoot him, Buckley was intimidated by the splendour of the uniform and hesitated. Then, pulling himself together, he got his finger back on the trigger... he looked down the barrel and secured him in his sights. He was about to shoot but, unexpectedly, all of a sudden, the General was unbuttoning his trousers and crouching down to relieve himself. Buckley was overcome by sympathy for this bare man before him, and felt he must respect the call of nature. He waited for the General to finish and get his clothes in order. But as he did so, Buckley saw, with disgust, the General wipe himself clean with a lump of earth. Overcoming all his finer feelings, he took aim and fired, blowing the half-dressed General to smithereens. This apparently comic story, which Joyce had heard from his father (and which has deeper roots than the Crimean setting implies), is reframed in *Finnegans Wake* within a dialogue between two vaudeville performers: Taff, the compère, and Butt, the narrator, reminiscing about his days as a soldier. Their dialogue is thought to be a television programme, being transmitted through a new set into a pub. It is temptingly useful to simplify and narrow things down to such a realist level, but uncertainties abound: are they televised, or standing on stage, or in a pub, beside a TV perhaps? Do the televised events interrupt the narrative as told by Butt and Taff, or offer a coincidental parallel to the events they relate? Acknowledging the stubborn presence of this uncertainty is as important as attempting to secure a 'realist' level. A reader needs to be able to occupy both states, and to move between them.

But in any case, there are undoubtedly many references to television, in particular during the third of five intermissions that, somewhat disruptively, provide commentary on the narration. This intermission, which happens before

Butt describes seeing the General relieve himself, provides some context for Butt's vision, or a version of it. It begins with a cavalry assault – the doomed Charge of the Light Brigade – followed by the striking and ghostly appearance, through the battle-smoke, of the Russian General in all his magnificence. Unexpectedly, he turns into a vicar and begins a public confession (the implication being that shitting and confessing resemble each other as forms of unloading). During this confession the General breaks down, falling into pieces. In adapting this anecdote of the mid-nineteenth century – when photography was in its infancy – Joyce spreads over it twentieth-century material of a technological process that emerged out of photography – television. In the passage that follows, we pick up the text as Taff invites Butt to sing forth his material. In what follows I have underlined words that refer to televisual technology and which Joyce transferred from a late notebook (VI.B.46), in which he had recorded notes under the heading 'Television' (Rose 1978: 205–208). He did so from a source that has not yet been identified, but was probably some sort of technical manual.

TAFF (... *passing the uninational toothbosh in smoothing irony over the multinotcheralled infructuosities of his grinner set*) ... Sing in the chorias to the ethur!

[In the heliotropical noughttime following a fade of transformed Tuff and, pending its viseversion, a metenergic reglow of beaming Batt, the bairdboard bombardment screen, of taste-fully taut guranium satin, tends to teleframe and step up to the charge of a light barricade. Down the photoslope in syncopanc pulses, with the bitts bugtwug their teffs, the missledhropes glitteraglatte glutt, borne by their carnier walve. Spraygun rakes and splits them from a double focus: grenadite, damny-mite, alextronite, nichilite: and the scanning firespot of the sgunners traverses the rutilanced illustred sunksundered lines. Shlossh! A gospel truce leaks out over the caeseine coatings. Amid a fluorescence of spectracular mephiticism there caoculates through the inconoscope stealdily a still, the figure of a fellow-chap in the wohly ghast, Popey O'Donoshough, the jesuneral of the russuates. The idolon exhibisces the seals of his orders: the starre of the Son of Heaven, the girtel of Izodella the Calotica, the cross of Michelides Apaleogos, the latchet of Jan of Nepomuk, the puffpuff and pompom of Powther and Pall, the great belt, band and bucklings of the Martyrology of Gorman. It is for the castomercies mudwake surveice. The victar. Please to notnoys speak above your dreadths, please to doughboys. Hll,

smthngs gnwrng wthth sprsnwtch! He blanks his oggles because he confesses to all his tellavicious nieces. He blocks his nosoes because that he confesses to everywhere he was always putting up his latest faengers. He wollops his mouther with a sword of tusk in as because that he confesses how opten he used be obening her howonton he used be undering her. He boundless alltgotter his manucupes with his pedarrests in asmuch as because that he confesses before all his handcomplishies and behind all his comfoderacies. And he touched upon this tree of livings in the middenst of the gareden for inasmuch as because that he confessed to it on Hillel and down Dalem and in the places which the lepers in habit in the place of the stones and in pontofert jusfuggading amoret now he come to think of it jolly well ruttengenerously olyovyover the ole blucky shop. Puggger old Pumppey O'Dungaschiff! There will be a hen collection of him after avensung on the feld of Hanar. Dumble down, looties and gengstermen! Dtin, dtin, dtin, dtin!]

(Joyce 2012: 348.29–350.08)¹

There has been diverse and valuable criticism on this passage, ranging from philological work that provides commentary, exegesis and genetic material (Campbell and Robinson 1946; Rose 1978), to theoretical work, which examines *Finnegans Wake* as a reflection on the history of media and the possibilities of a 'techno-poetics' (Armand 2003; McLuhan 1964; Theall 1997). Only T. J. Rice's chapter in his *Cannibal Joyce* has sought to integrate Joyce's interest with the contemporary impact of television. Rice's emphasis on the historical context, which we're extending here, marked an important intervention, especially given – as Rice points out – that as influential a commentator as William York Tindall was once able to say that 'there was no TV at the time of... Joyce's writing' (Tindall 1957: 197).

Exegesis, both early (in Campbell & Robinson) and more recent (Rose & O'Hanlon), has 'translated' this intermission into more or less plain English. Here's my attempt:

After Taff fades away and before Butt returns, all shiny, there's a screening of the charge of the light brigade. Moving in syncopation down the slope, the misled troops, all a-glitter and a-clatter, tightly packed, are borne on the wave of their own energy. A gun rakes them from left to right. Gunners scan the lines of the six hundred, illustrious, now broken up and sinking. Splosh! It's the end! A ghastly truth spreads among the French leaders in their silvery jackets. Out of the pungent smoke, the Russian General appears, showing off all the baubles of his office. It is the customary midweek service. A vicar. Please sit still and

be quiet. Hell! Something's gone wrong with the supersonic switch! Covering his eyes he confesses publically, to all, his vicious sins. Blocking his nostrils he confesses to picking his nose. Hitting his mouth, he confesses how he was always sexually admiring his mother. Claspng his hands together he confesses to the filthy mutual masturbation with his school mates. And holding his hand over his loins, he confessed up hill, down dale and all over the shop. Bugger the old pile of rubbish! He'll be swept up after the show.

Such a translation hardly produces a naturalist level of narrative; it also reduces, of course, the multilayered quality of Joyce's language; and it diminishes the role of interference that the many layers bring about. But it serves, nevertheless, as an introduction for analysing the layers and the interference. This interference, which is fairly constant throughout the book – what we might call the white noise of Joyce's text – reflects Joyce's sense of transformation in the field of communication, to which the new technologies were contributing. A crucial layer here is some technical vocabulary relating to the production of TV images, as indicated by the underlined words. Joyce had, with considerable care, absorbed the technical processes of producing a televisual image, an absorption which is extremely rare amongst those contributing to the cultural meanings of television. In Joyce's fusion of televisual processes with a cavalry charge, it is tempting to interpret a projection on Joyce's part of the violence of war onto the invasive power of this innovative technology. The screen – or the viewer themselves – receives, like an entrenched army, a 'bombardment' of light. A strong connection is thus made between war and television, pre-empting Friedrich Kittler's recent analysis of the development of television as an offshoot of German military research in the 1920s and the 1930s (Kittler 2010: 208).

If such an interpretation is justified, Joyce's sense of violence resembles other early responses, especially within science fiction narratives, as the following two instances illustrate. The first of these is Conan Doyle's 1929 short story, 'The Disintegration Machine.' It is one of Doyle's 'Challenger' stories, his replacement for the Sherlock Holmes stories, which were never to be as successful. The machine in question can both dissolve and reconstitute objects – whether humans or battleships, or even cities. The machine is a translation of televisual technology. Where TV only ever dissolves, translates and reconstitutes images of things, the disintegration machine operates on things themselves. But the magic of TV was to make it seem as if it was able to do the former, as expressed decades later by David Byrne in the Talking Heads song 'Television Man': 'the world crashes in to my living room. Television made me what I am.' Conan Doyle's fantasy betrays not only an anxiety of international violence, but a belief that actual bodies and

electrical representations of those bodies are, being of the same order, equally transmittable, a voodoo fantasy about the power of representation and of art itself. In Doyle's story, the inventor – one Nemor, a Latvian with sufficiently semitic features to indicate that he is a Jewish émigré (he lives in Hampstead) – is dastardly. As Challenger and the narrator Malone arrive, a group of Russian Communists is leaving. Since they have just expressed a dastardly interest in Nemor's invention, London and world peace are threatened. But Challenger – brave, sceptical and resourceful – is at hand. The machine itself, with a 'huge magnet', a three-foot long 'prism', a chair on a 'zinc platform', 'a sort of ratchet with numbered slots and a handle' and many thick cables attached, would have conjured up, for the story's readers, images of Baird's mechanical system, then much in the news since Baird was beginning to win over sceptical audiences. The analogy with psychic research in this story is explicit when Nemor speaks about 'apports' in Western occultism (Doyle 1929: 3–10), something Doyle had infamously signed up to. At first Challenger refuses to believe Nemor but, after a couple of successful demonstrations, he is willing to undergo 'disintegration'. In a comic turn, Nemor punishes Challenger for his initial doubts by reassembling him without the 'glorious mane' of his hair, a key component of Challenger's persona. Challenger threatens Nemor physically in order to get his hair back. Then, inspecting the machine, and pretending to find some electricity leaking from it, Challenger lures Nemor onto the apparatus and suddenly activates the ratchet. Nemor disappears. Challenger pretends to be unable to reassemble Nemor, saying to his companion that 'the interesting personality has distributed itself throughout the cosmos'.

Another example of such teleportation by television may have grown out of Doyle's story. In 1933, there was a low-budget mini-series produced for the cinema called *The Whispering Shadow*, starring Bela Lugosi. It centred around a mysterious criminal who was able to commit crimes by means of a gang he controlled by television and radio rays. 'No man has ever seen the Shadow, but his genius for manipulating radio and television enables him to project his voice and shadow wherever he desires; he can see through doors, hear through walls and electrocute people by radio death ray' (Clark and Herman 1933). The power of the *Whispering Shadow* is ballistic *and* hypnotic. It is as if film is expressing its own fears of this competing technology, which was threatening to pull people back from cinemas and into their homes.

In both of these stories, it is human beings, not just images of humans, that are transmitted by some form of electricity. This imaginative adaptation of the new media accompanies dreams of world domination. Imperialism, whether

in capitalist, communist or fascist guises, produced a global imaginary of territorial domination. Television had quickly become part of a technological modernity that would enable national forces to conquer space by making it shrink. World domination was not foreign to the development of television: Britain, America, Russia and Germany were the early key pioneers in the 1930s. The development of TV involved international collaboration and competition. When Joyce associates television with violence, it is not, I suggest, of this order, where TV is a psychic weapon for transporting human spirit through the ether. The association is a coincidence presented to us with no indication that the relation between television and violence is a necessary one. That people enjoy the spectacle of violence (as the ample amounts of bloody violence represented on the stage and the screen clearly witness) might explain their coexistence in representation here. But this is a representation of a certain taste, not a critique of the medium. And it seems a stretch to say that because an image is produced by a bombardment of electrons, it is a violent process necessarily commensurate with the bombardment of troops by shells. Rice says as much when he claims that Joyce found in television ‘an analogue with the butchery of war itself’ and that his response overall was ‘profoundly negative’ (Rice 2008: 157, 140).

Comparing the passage in the *Wake* with these tales of prospective world domination to be achieved through the televisual transmission of human beings, we note that Taff ‘fades’, Butt ‘reglows’ and the Popey O’Donoshough ‘caoculates’, a coagulation that blends ‘coagulates’ and ‘oculates’ – an obsolete word meaning ‘set eyes on’. This ‘Popey’ figure, moreover, also needs to be ‘collected’ at the end of the ‘service’ (Joyce punning on radio ‘service’ and a Church ‘service’). These verbs can apply to people in the flesh, or their images reproduced on the screen. Joyce is clearly inviting analogies between what happens with the production of televisual images, the way they glow and fade, and the way people too become vague or vivid to our sight or memories. We begin to see and imagine people in the way we see images of those people. Perceptions of the Human are transformed, become televisual. The magic of television is like the magic of spiritualism: the spectacular is fused with the spectral in the word ‘*spectacular*’, within which an echo of ‘*Dracula*’ can also be heard. The figure is of a ‘wohly ghaist’, some wholly ghastly ghost. Joyce thus accommodates the spiritualist fantasies that were attaching themselves to the processes of these new media technologies. But where the science fictions rely on uncanny feelings towards television, and understandings of these transformations as horrifyingly actual, *Finnegans Wake* remains cheekily and consciously in the realm of the metaphorical, moving back and forth between reality and representation, between the transformation of

images and the transformations of human beings. Because of the attention on the technical language, we can be aware that whatever magic there appears to be, is a trick of technique rather than real magic, just as the ghost that rises through the floor in a puff of smoke on the stage (as Stephen's mother does in the burlesque theatre of 'Circe') is the projection of a theatrical production involving smoke, trapdoors and/or mirrors.

The language of *Finnegans Wake* is key here in enabling such movements back and forth. Its distortions remind us continually of the constructedness and the materiality of the medium, the elaborate framing device that comes to constitute the entire piece of art, impeding our suspension of disbelief. On the other hand, the radical difference of this language also invites the perception of an entirely other and parallel world, the dream as reality. The science fictions, by contrast, rely for their effects on the suspension of disbelief. They also involve wilfully strong misreadings of the science, in order to contribute to a feeling of modern magic. Anxieties induced by technological innovation are fuelled by such misreadings, just as the misreadings feed off the anxieties. Joyce, especially in his precise and geekish deployment of the idioms around the technical processes, prevents his prose from indulging in the exploitative hysteria of these stories.

When it comes to the global imaginary and how television will enable a new global consciousness (McLuhan's 'global village'), Joyce's vision is at once more original and prophetic than his relation to the spiritualist projections of television's 'ghost in the machine'. But it is accidentally so: Joyce had always planned that HCE, as an accused figure, would, in one version of his trial, offer a confession. He had also always planned Buckley's tale: confession and excretion, as mentioned, come together via the metaphor of 'unloading'. The TV show, which Joyce used to frame the story, thus comes to contain a TV confession. Joyce's vision of a televised future includes, by chance as it were, an international celebrity who astounds everyone (something must have gone wrong!) by making a confession, which is then transmitted to the whole world, the kind of sensational event that 'reality TV' craves. Combining a predetermined narrative structure with contingent developments in the field of communications, Joyce's experiments have stumbled across the projection of a future, the prophecy of TV confessions, as of a televangelist, or a world leader, like Clinton. The figure, as any 'Everyman', is, typically, composite: 'Popey O'Donoshough' signals, all at once, a father, a Pope, an Irish noble (an 'O'Donoghue of the Glens'), a Cossack military aristocrat (one of the Denisovs) and, last but not least, the cartoon character Popeye (for Denisovs, see Mikaberidze 2005: 72–74). In this composite form he is cartoonish, lumpily hybrid, like Popeye himself, and can

mean at least *something* to an enormous audience from around the globe made up of Catholics, Irish, Americans, Russians and anyone else interested in global celebrity. The global village has found a scapegoat.

Joyce's writing at this time has also coincided with a series of trials that were being reported around the world: the Moscow Show Trials in which Stalin found a series of scapegoats, or 'Trotskyite conspirators'. Joyce's focus on an anecdotal assassination of a Russian General in this section led him to focus on Russia, both past and present. Joyce did have an austere attitude to political discussions, but he undoubtedly watched politics carefully, kept abreast of the international news, especially in the overheated 1930s. One of his closest companions in those days was Paul Léon, a Russian émigré. It is unthinkable that Joyce would not have been registering what was happening in the Soviet Union at that time. Reports of the show trials were widespread. Newspapers expressed scepticism about the 'loathsome' judicial processes, outrage at their ruthlessness and suspicion of torture (see Bibliography, *The Times*). On 14 June 1937, for example, *The Times* wrote of 'Yesterday's heroes ... being execrated as monsters of turpitude; a nebulous and condemnatory epitaph has been issued over the signature of Marshal Voroshiloff' (15). In Joyce's tale, the confession made by the Russian General is bizarre. It is formally highly structured, following – more or less – the pattern set by extreme unction, in which the body parts associated with the five senses (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands), and then the feet and, in the case of men, the loins, are all anointed with oil, as a purification before death, suggesting here an inevitable judgement of death. The syntax becomes increasingly tortuous (*because he confessed ... for inasmuch as that he confessed*). The sins confessed to range from extreme triviality ('*he blocks his nosoes ...*' or picking his nose) to violent incestuous feelings towards his mother ('*he wollops his moulder ... confesses how opten he used be obening her*'). Following this confession, he is now ripe for execution, perhaps by buggery, and resembles the defeated subject of classical history, 'Pompey', assassinated while trying to disembark, pumping out a boat load of shite: '*Pugger old Pumpey O'Dungaschiff!*' The public televised confession precedes an execution, though the latter does not seem to be televised. The usefulness of confession in speeding up a judicial process, as in the Moscow Show Trials, is combined with someone's humbling attempt to clear their own name. Both lead to contempt at the hands of the audience who turn on the subject. There is an attempt to calm the threats of disorder, from looting and gangsters: '*Dumble down, looties and gengstermen*'.

Joyce thus predicts the immense power of television as State Propaganda but also as tool for an individual's PR. Huxley had already done this in *Brave New World*, with the 'Bureaux of Propaganda by Television' (Huxley 1994: 59), but it is the material of public confession that makes Joyce's forecast original. Through the tool of television, the world can become a massive visitors' gallery of a courtroom. Unlike in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), however, power in *Finnegans Wake*, whether technological or human, while it can take on gigantic and nightmarish proportions, does also always have flaws which lead to farcical effects. It is significant that the confession of sin – or error – is perceived as coming about through a technical hitch, registered in an interruption to the otherwise smoothly running transmission: '*Hll, smthngs gnwrng wthth sprnswtch!*' Communication is already distorted here, the vowels squeezed out as if through a compression of the airwaves, evoking the clenched teeth of anger. Allowed to breathe, the exclamation would be 'Hell, something's gone wrong with the supersonic switch!' The supersonic switch is a control on a TV set that would have determined the source of sound that accompanies the images: in the early days of television, image and sound were transmitted from two different stations, and also received separately. At a realist level, it's as if we're watching one scene on Channel 1, then suddenly getting interference from a different script on Channel 2. As in *Singing in the Rain*, the sound is not synchronized with the sight and an arbitrary comical ventriloquy results. But at another level, the different channel represents the eruption of the repressed: whereas a sermon from on high is expected, as at a religious service, instead a series of deeply embarrassing confessions issues forth, as if from the unconscious, from down below, a private hell flooding a scene of public virtue. Something has gone wrong with the messages we are receiving from on high. In such farcical moments, what might be tragic becomes comic. The inherent fallen-ness – as imperfection, rather than sin – of the human, and which constitutes of course central narratives and themes of Joyce's book, is extended to technology.

We look to Joyce for judgement that will confirm our views: for a celebration of democratizing popular culture; or a denigratory critique of the hypnotic controlling power of bland or sentimental propaganda; or a deferral of judgement, itself, of course, a position – that of the artist's indifferent transcendence. But any clear judgement on Joyce's part of the value of television is so embedded in complex mutually interfering layers, as to be inextricable. In engaging with this particular new mode of communication, this particular new form of modernity, Joyce manages to relay the wide spectrum of responses. TV has always had its

critics, and maybe it is complicit with technologies of war, as Rice and Kittler have argued. But it also brings a promise of new sensory experiences, as A. M. Low imagined it might one day extend to smell and taste. It does indeed bring also a kind of global awareness to our homes, as Rudolf Arnheim was suggesting, in a richly if naively optimistic passage, in 1936:

Television will not only portray the world as the film does ... We shall be able to participate in distant events at the moment of their happening. ... With television wireless becomes documentary. It lets us participate in what is going on in the great world around us. We can see in the principal square of the neighbouring town people streaming by on their way to a meeting, we can hear the ruler of the neighbouring state speaking, we can see the boxers on the other side of the sea fighting for the world's championship, we can see English dance-bands, Italian coluraturas, German intellectuals, the rumbling crash of railway trains in collision, the masks of carnival, from an aeroplane we can see snowy mountains between clouds ... The great world itself lives its life in our room ... relative of the car and the aeroplane. Merely a means of transmission, containing no such elements of a new mode of presenting reality as the film and non-pictorial wireless, but like the machines of locomotion that the last century gave us, it alters our relation to reality itself, teaches us to know it better, and lets us sense the multiplicity of what is happening everywhere at one moment. We ... become more modest and less egocentric.

TV implies a new and enormous conquest by our sense of space and time, and enriches the world of our senses to the most extraordinary degree.

(Arnheim 1936: 279–280)

Arnheim's technically wrong emphasis on 'participation' is curious and, given the date, ironic. TV hardly proved to be participatory. And yet the contrary assumption of passive audiences is not one that Joyce ascribes to either: after the TV show, the pub audience seem, in turning against the innkeeper, to have been incited to rebellion by the tales they have consumed, whether the medium of their representation is speech, print, radio or TV. And Arnheim, moreover, seems right that our senses were enriched.

Joyce, I suggest, does not take sides in the debate for and against the new medium, which was already raging in the 1930s. What is clear, however, is a strong engagement with its technical aspects and an inventive exploration of the metaphorical dimensions of these new techniques. This exploration sees the production of images as dramatic and exciting. He twists the terms of the technology towards the book's universal theme of our serial falls, large and small, into and out of representations, into and out of our senses; falls that befall

us through sight and through sound, in image and in word. The comedy of such falls should work to alleviate technophobic fears of totalitarian dystopia. But the consumption of such a comedy, as *Finnegans Wake* contains, was - like the consumption of television - in essence interrupted, as a war of totalitarian visions broke out.

Abbreviation

TSW = *Television and Short Wave World*

Note

- 1 I have adopted two editorial changes both of which appear in Rose and O'Hanlon's 2010 'restored' edition of *Finnegans Wake*: (a) 'of tastefully' was 'if tastefully' in the 3rd edition and (b) I have deleted a comma after 'missledhropes'.

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