

Resisting with Authority? Anarchist Laughter and the Violence of Truth

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Abstract

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Keywords

Authority; Foucault; grotesque; humour; non-representational theory; parrhesia.

Resisting with Authority? Anarchist Laughter and the Violence of Truth

In his 1974-75 College de France course *Abnormal*, Michel Foucault starts his lectures by discussing the role of psychological expertise in the attribution of criminal responsibility. As Foucault reads out absurd character judgments by so-called psychological experts, which had the awesome effect of deciding whether a suspect could be regarded as criminally responsible for a crime, the lecture theatre fills with laughter. This laughter, he suggests, is very interesting: '[D]iscourses of truth that provoke laughter and have the institutional power to kill', he observes 'are... discourses that deserve some attention. [...] These everyday discourses of truth that kill and provoke laughter are at the very heart of our judicial system.' (Foucault, 2003: 12). These expert witnesses, he suggests have a *grotesque* quality, since they wield an extreme level of power (ultimately, the power over life and death) that their intrinsic qualities – the patent inadequacy of their analyses - should disqualify them from. This grotesque quality at the heart of the modern penal system, he suggests, 'is one of the cogs that are an inherent part of the mechanisms of power. Political power, at least in some societies ... can give itself, and has actually given itself, the possibility of conveying its effects and ... finding their source, in a place that is manifestly, explicitly, and readily discredited as odious, despicable, or ridiculous' (Foucault, 2003: 12). The political grotesque, he adds, is an essential process not only of arbitrary sovereignty, but also of administrative bureaucracies, and of other forms of power such as Nazism or Fascism. Mussolini, for example, was an unambiguously grotesque character: 'power provided itself with an image in which power derived from someone who was theatrically got up and depicted as a clown or a buffoon' (2003: 13).

Laughter, it seems, is closely bound up with the violent mechanisms of state authority. However, laughter is also associated with the disruption and ungrounding of authority. Take Foucault's preface to *The Order of Things*, where he describes the laughter provoked by a fictional taxonomy of animals in a Borges essay (Foucault, 1970). In this imagined Chinese encyclopaedia, where animals are classified into categories such as, 'Those that belong to the emperor', 'embalmed ones', 'mermaids (or sirens)', 'fabulous ones', 'those that tremble as if they were mad', and 'innumerable ones', Foucault suggests what is at stake is not the exotic charm of another, incongruous system of thought, but 'the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that'. According to Foucault, his laughter isn't provoked by mere incongruity (as one leading theory of humour might lead us to suppose), but by a disorder that is more unsettling and uneasy. The source of laughter is that 'in such a state, things are "laid", "placed", "arranged" in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible ... to define a *common locus* beneath them all'. Laughter emerges where the limits of authoritative discourse become visible.

What binds the two accounts is the idea that laughter emerges from a kind of ungrounding of authority. In the case of the political grotesque, it arises from making visible the clownish absurdity, the lack of stable grounding, of discourses that are accorded a power over life and death. In the case of Borges' *Encyclopaedia*, laughter emerges from an experience of being exposed to the limits of thought and feeling, and thus confronting their lack of stable foundation. In this article, I aim to explore some of these links between laughter, authority, truth, and violence. In doing so, I contribute to debates in social and cultural geography around the importance of humour and laughter, especially 'dark', 'black', or 'gallows' humour in the production and contestation of spaces, places, and communities (Breton, 1997; Emmerson, 2018; Scott, 2007; Clark and Fluri, 2019). In doing so, the paper asks how Foucault's account of parrhesia may provide insights into the geographies of truth, violence, laughter, and authority. Drawing on two case studies of late nineteenth century French anarchist culture, I argue that humour and laughter can play important roles in learning to speak truth to power in ways that command respect and authority.

The paper begins by making new connections between geographical research on humour and laughter, and literature on social geographies of authority. In doing so, I argue that humour and laughter not only undermine authority but can also generate new forms of authoritative speech. I then theorise the link between authority, truth, and laughter through a reading of Foucault's account of Ancient Greek parrhesia and Cynical truth-telling. We then move on to the two empirical sections of the paper. First, I explore how humour, parody and satire were used to expose the violent foundations of the state in the French Third Republic, before analysing the grotesque, uncanny laughter of the anarchist bomber Ravachol's severed head.

Modalities of Power and Genres of Humour

There is an important geography to humour, since humour helps establish boundaries between who belongs and who is excluded (Kuipers, 2006). Humour is also, through emotional economies of ridicule, shame, and embarrassment, a powerful way of ensuring compliance with the rules of social environments (Billig, 2005). Jokes and humour express the norms and values of certain places and people, and they can contribute to a positioning of certain groups as 'in place' or 'out of place' (Cresswell, 2013; Macpherson, 2008; Ridanpää, 2014; 2017). Whilst it can be tempting to see humour as something affirmative, creative, and anti-authoritarian, humour also plays an important role in reproducing and legitimising hegemonic power and authority. Successful jokes have to be recognised as funny, meaning that they must be socially validated, and thus presuppose a community of humour (Lockyer and Pickering, 2008). Moreover, humour's anarchic quality, its capacity to transgress social norms and ridicule cherished values, can function to reinforce elite

power (as with racist or misogynist comedy, for example). Nevertheless, humour can be an important and highly effective tool for challenging norms, contesting spatial relations, and articulating new micropolitics (Kanngieser, 2013; Epstein and Iveson, 2009; Sharpe et al., 2014).

In Allen's (2003) *Lost Geographies of Power*, he appeals to geographers to carefully distinguish between different modalities of power such as persuasion, collective action, manipulation, seduction, violence, and authority. Geographical research has explored the place of humour in these various modalities (e.g. Routledge, 2012: on collective empowerment; Emmerson, 2017: on humorous manipulations of affective atmospheres; Bissell et al., 2012: on seductive humour; Sharpe et al., 2005: on humour and violence). However, one of humour's most important modalities is also one that is relatively neglected within social and cultural geography: authority. Authority is a relation based on recognition of an authority figure's ethical qualities such as expertise, wisdom, reliability, capacity, skill, or strength (Osborne, 1998). Hannah Arendt observes that because authority only exists when it is *recognised* to exist, '[t]he greatest enemy of authority ... is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter' (Arendt, 1961). Laughter is a powerful way to attack authority, since it undermines respect for those who hold positions of authority. Indeed, the notion that laughter is closely linked to the critique of authority crops up frequently in research on humour. Strikingly, however, little geographical research on anti-authoritarian humour theorises authority itself.

Outside geography, we find many fine-grained analyses of different genres and techniques of humour, and their relationship with authority. In what follows, I avoid subscribing to a general theory of humour (for an overview of which, see Morreall, 1987; Billig, 2005), but instead look to how the mechanisms of humour and laughter function within specific spaces and contexts. It may be useful for the analysis that follows, therefore, to distinguish between important forms and genres of humour, including jokes, satire, parody, irony, and the grotesque. First, satire is a form of discourse that both elicits laughter and casts judgment on its target. Whereas a political joke may merely address political topics in a humorous way, without offering any broader comment on them, satire explicitly questions the targeted political or social order (Test, 1991). However, satire often reinforces dominant authority by mocking non-normative behaviour. Nevertheless, satire is also used to more subversive ends (Day, 2011). Parody, meanwhile, works by playing on an audience's knowledge of a text, person, place, or concept and humorously exaggerating its most familiar aspects. It is a form of imitation characterized by inversion, and it is often, but not always, pejorative. (Hence, parody is frequently satirical). Parody can be subversive, but also may reinforce existing hierarchies, or occupy an ambivalent position 'between conservative repetition and revolutionary difference' (Hutcheon, 1985: 77). Parody is closely linked to irony, which is discourse that says the opposite of what it means, or more broadly, articulates a gap between two

conflicting realities (Colebrook, 2004). The grotesque, finally, is a form (sometimes, but not always, humorous) that is linked to degradation: lowering anything that is disembodied, spiritual, or ideal to the material, vulgar, and corporeal (Thorogood, 2016).

Humour is distinct from laughter (Emmerson, 2017). As Georges Bataille pointed out, laughter is associated with numerous acts that are not obviously humorous, such as tickling (Lawtoo, 2011). Indeed, laughter also accompanies phenomena such as sexuality, transgression, the sacred, and violence, all of which occasion an encounter with the kind of 'non-knowledge' that Foucault evokes in *The Order of Things*: a destruction of discourse and of normal modes of speaking reasonably and truthfully. There are important relationships between laughter and authority, therefore, that do not function through humour, but through other practices that disrupt existing forms of truth, knowledge, and expertise. The relationship between authority and laughter, therefore, is far from simple. Indeed, understanding authoritarian and anti-authoritarian laughter requires a clearer theorisation of authority itself.

Foucault on Militant Laughter and Parrhesia

What, then, *is* authority? In contrast to Weberian theorisations of authority that reduce authority to a form of domination, cultural geographies of authority have recently emphasized the importance of 'experiential authority': forms of authority that gain their force through either intensities of experience or collective experiments with experience (Dawney, 2018; Lea et al., 2016; Millner, 2013; Brigstocke, 2014). These accounts of authority emphasise that it is a relation that is embodied, dispersed, affective, and tied to experiences of vitality, growth, and the outside (Blencowe, 2012; 2013). Dawney (2013; 2018), for example, charts the emergence of powerful 'figures of authority' who are listened to (and hence granted authority) because of the intensity with which experiences have affected them – for example, the experience of grief or suffering. Lea et al. (2016), similarly, theorise authority in ashtanga yoga as distributed, relational, and multiple, rather than inhering in the figure of the teacher. Such theorisations offer a picture of how authority gains force through intensities of experience, as well as through practices of experimenting with experience (Noorani, 2013). They also highlight that authority is not simply a relation between two or more people; rather, it is a distributed relation whose force depends upon the distinctive material and affective qualities of specific places.

Is it possible to resist with authority? Whilst there is good reason to be critical of the discourse of resistance, which posits a resistance/domination binary, it is helpful to reframe the question in terms of authoritative speech or actions that challenge existing relations of power. As Judith Butler has observed in relation to Rosa Park's act of refusal on a racially segregated Montgomery

bus, 'it is possible to speak with authority without being authorized to speak' (Butler, 1997: 157). Authoritative speech and actions are not always legitimised by external authorizing institutional structures, but sometimes gain their force from other, immanently produced criteria and standards (cf Lovell, 2003). I will suggest that humour is an important vehicle for anti-authoritarian practices, not only because it is effective in undermining hegemonic authority, but also because it helps legitimise new, oppositional modes of authoritative discourse and practice.

To unpack this, I turn to Foucault's theorisation of 'parrhesia', or courageous truth-telling. Having spent much of his career demonstrating how political authority is invisibly intertwined with the authority of expertise, Foucault (2001; 2010; 2011) later developed a genealogy of practices that established more critical and combative relationships with expert authority. Foucault's study of parrhesia explored fearless speech in a range of historical and geographical settings, including: the emergence in Antiquity of discourses on political truth-telling; the development of philosophical parrhesia as advice to, or denunciation of, a ruler; the deployment of parrhesia in early Christian practices of renunciation; and the development of modern form of parrhesia in critical philosophy, in forms of modern art, and in the traditions of 19th century revolutionaries (Legg, 2018). An important element of Foucault's genealogy is his discussion of the Cynics of Ancient Greece, whose combative forms of advice were reactivated in various forms in modernity (Anonymized).

Whilst it is tempting to see parrhesia as a theorisation of resistance, this is a vocabulary which Foucault avoids, since it falls back into a problematic dualism of power / resistance. As Legg (2019:29) notes, the vast majority of acts of parrhesia discussed by Foucault do not constitute any kind of straightforward example of resistance. Instead, he explores connections between ethical concerns around the government of the self and political issues concerning the government of others (Macmillan, 2011; Brigstocke, 2013). In contrast to the truth-telling of the expert, parrhesia is a verbal activity where a speaker expresses a personal relationship to truth, and puts herself at risk because she recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people as well as herself (Foucault, 2001: 20). With parrhesia, an essential part of the experience of truth is the active transformation of the self. Parrhesia is less a form of resistance, than a productive form of power that produces new reflections on how people relate to themselves, to others and to their environments (Legg, 2019: 29)

Foucault (2011) is particularly interested in the Cynics' practices of truth-telling through provocation, through living a 'life of scandal' in public. Indeed, in a few brief lines, he speculatively links both the nineteenth-century militant ideal of revolutionary life as a violent, shocking manifestation of truth, and the emergence of modern art as a form of perpetual self-critique, to the scandalous practices of Cynics such as Diogenes. The Cynics practiced forms of truth-telling

that required living life as a polemic dramatization of dangerous truths. Cynicism was a form of 'militancy in the open ... that is it say, a militancy addressed to absolutely everyone ... which resorts to harsh and drastic means, not so much in order to train people and teach them, as to shake them up and convert them, abruptly' (Foucault, 2011: 284). Similarly, he argues, the idea of the revolutionary life that emerged in the 19th century made the practice of everyday life an important vehicle for revealing shocking truths. This has implications for thinking about the geographies of parrhesia, as in the case of the Cynics we see parrhesia move from the spaces of the palace or agora to the open, everyday spaces of the city.

For the Cynics (meaning 'dog-like'), an important way of telling scandalous truths to power was shocking and derisory behaviour. Diogenes positioned himself as a kind of counter-king, a 'king of derision' who, 'by the existence he has chosen, and by the destitution and renunciation to which he exposes himself, deliberately hides himself as king' (Foucault, 2011: 278). This is another kind of grotesque sovereignty, manifest in shocking practices that were considered out of place: eating in the marketplace, urinating on those who insulted him, defecating in the theatre, and masturbating in public. Indeed, the Cynics' emphasis on living a truthful life, rather than passing down discursive truths, partly explains their habit of passing down their teachings through jokes and humorous anecdotes rather than systematic teachings (Foucault, 2011, p. 208).¹ It also raised the question of the *place* of truth: the city. As Legg (2019: 40) remarks, 'Cynics used their embodiment of the true life to insert a radical otherness into the city ... It posed the other life in the here and now as an immediate way of changing a place through caring for the self differently'.

In Luxon's (2013) analysis, there are three movements in the game of fearless truth-telling. First, there is a search for a speaker considered truthful. In parrhesia, there is always an asymmetry of power: the parrhesiast is less powerful than her interlocutor. This raises the problem of how the ruler can be sure that the parrhesiast is indeed speaking truly, and not speaking out of fear, self-interest, or a desire to flatter. For this reason, the parrhesiast must find ways of demonstrating that she is independent and sincere. The second movement involves a 'joust' or 'combat' between the parrhesiast and her interlocutor, testing the authority of each through mutual provocation. Parrhesia thus involves agonism or confrontation. For parrhesia to be effective, both parties must embrace risk and act courageously. The truth-teller must accept the risk of offending her interlocutor and being punished for it; her interlocutor must also embrace risk by being prepared to accept as true the hurtful truth that she hears. The third movement of parrhesia is the building of affective relations of care binding the participants. Parrhesia requires practices of 'psychagogy' (Foucault, 2010: Chapter 18), a relationship based on the intellectual and emotional connections that form the emotional fabric of pedagogy. Parrhesia never moves to a predictable end and is never fixed in advance. It calls upon the hopes and fears of the participants, but gradually the

emotional bond shifts from the personality and personal authority of the parrhesiast, towards truthfulness and the search for a truthful life (Luxon, 2013: 161).

This reading of parrhesia, however, tells us little about its geographies. How are the three movements of parrhesia produced by, and productive of, distinct spatialities? This is a theme taken up by Legg (2018, 2019), who highlights how advice to a ruler was connected, not only to the work they did upon themselves, but also to their political geographical context. He identifies two aspects of the geographies of parrhesia. First, its risk emerged from its space of intervention (e.g. an Assembly, a royal court, the agora, a temple, or the street). Second, parrhesia sought to change the world, taking aim at the city, the state, the empire, or even the universe (Legg, 2019:30). Foucault's account of parrhesia, therefore, offers us a new route into understanding the spatialities through which power, authority, subjectivity, and resistance come into being.

Moreover, the concept of parrhesia complicates cultural geographical accounts of 'experiential authority' discussed above. For example, whereas Dawney (2013; 2018) focuses on how authority can be generated through performances of intensities of experience such as suffering, Foucault's theory of parrhesia would indicate that this is only a first step. Intensity of experience may be important for demonstrating a truth-teller's independence and sincerity and worthiness to speak the truth (the first stage to parrhesia). For this to develop into meaningfully authoritative discourse, however, Foucault's account of parrhesia indicates that two more stages are equally important: an agonistic testing of each other's authority that transforms both parties; and a mutual relation of care that binds each party to the game of truth itself (Luxon, 2013). Similarly, where Noorani (2013) shows how authority is exerted through a collective experimentation with experience, there remains the question of how this effectiveness is tested and contested in ways that creatively transform, not only the parrhesiasts, but also their interlocutors. Both geographies of humour and geographies of authority, I would suggest, would benefit from paying closer attention to each of these three movements, rather than focusing their analysis at just one of these levels. In the following analysis of humour, laughter, and militant truth-telling in 19th century Montmartre, I am to show the importance of each element of parrhesia in establishing a new anarchist geography of authority, focusing on two aspects of the geography of parrhesia: the space of intervention; and the space that is targeted for improvement.

Drinking with Kings and Convicts

During the 1880s, several bohemian artistic cabarets, with an emphasis on humour and the celebration of minor artforms, sprang up in the working-class neighbourhood of Montmartre, on the northern edge of Paris (Chevalier, 1995; Cate and Shaw, 1996) Paris in the 1880s was a

city that was just beginning to recover its optimism following the devastating events of 1870-1871: first, France's humiliating defeat in military conflict with Prussia, which led to the Prussians laying siege to Paris in January 1871; second, the declaration of the Paris Commune, asserting radical municipal autonomy, grassroots democracy, and cancellation of all rents; and third, the 'bloody week' in which the suppression of the Commune by the French army killed thousands of Parisians, with thousands more deported to forced labour in New Caledonia. A provisional Republic was then established, but French political culture in the 1870s took a highly conservative turn towards 'moral order' and traditional authority (blaming France's humiliations on its declining religiosity), and it came very close to restoring the monarchy. However, by the 1880s the Third Republic was on a more secure footing, with the election in 1879 of a genuinely Republican President (Jules Grévy), and emphasis shifted away from moral order, based on the pillars of crown, altar, and family, towards a positivist vision of scientific, rational, progress based on industrial commerce and imperial expansion (Lehning, 2001).

The village of Montmartre, since being annexed into a rapidly expanding Paris in 1860, had quickly become a poor suburb of Paris. However, it retained a distinctive and picturesque rural character, thanks to the windmills, vineyards, and steep winding streets for which it is still famous. After the renovations of Paris during the Second Empire, during which much of the city was demolished and rebuilt according to a highly rationalized, geometrical, monumental plan, the winding lanes of Montmartre, which had not undergone this transformation, became a reminder of what had been lost in the process of modernization. Alongside a reputation for rural tranquillity, however, Montmartre also had a reputation for disorder. It had long been a place of popular entertainment (with lower alcohol prices than places within the borders of Paris), and it was on the slopes of Montmartre that the Paris Commune had been triggered, leading Montmartre to become strongly associated with the spirit of revolt. On the other hand, Montmartre also had strong religious symbolism attached to it. Its name is said to derive from Mons Martyrum (Martyr's Mount), in reference to the beheading of Bishop Dionysius by the Romans in AD250. (Dionysius is said to have then miraculously picked up his head and carried it 10km to the site of what is now the Basilica de Saint-Denis, preaching sermons along the way.) Following the Commune, Montmartre also became a construction site for the enormous Basilica de Sacré Coeur. The Basilica was supposed to be a monument to expiate the sins of Paris for the events of 1870-1871 (Harvey, 1979).

Montmartre's combination of semi-rural tranquillity and pre-modern urban form, its association with freedom, revolt, and autonomy, and its tradition of popular entertainment, made it a natural home for bohemians, political radicals, and various other marginalized urban figures. During this

period, cafes and cabarets emerged as vital cultural elements in Montmartre's attempts to define itself as a utopian community set apart from the city below. Montmartre had come to symbolize 'an ideal that in many ways embodied the anarchist version of utopia, not only in its championing of free creativity or local autonomy, but also in its balancing of the rural and the urban elements, the gardens and the cabarets ... it preserved its own sacred space from which to gaze down upon the metropolis, countering its economic dependence with cultural autonomy and radicalism' (Sonn, 1989: 94)

One anarchist cabaret that gained a degree of notoriety was the Taverne du Bagne (Penal Colony Tavern). The cabaret, opened by anarchist revolutionary Maxime Lisbonne in 1885, was a meeting point for anarchists (Louise Michel often gave rousing talks there), but also quickly became very popular with curious middle-classes with a taste for 'slumming' (Koven, 2004). Its house journal emphasized its symbolic location by adopting religious metaphors and emphasizing its popular sensibilities, in contrast to the ultra-fashionable Moulin de la Galette dance hall.

'Between Paris and Montmartre, half-way up Martyrs' Mount, the ex-forced labourer Maxime Lisbonne has just resuscitated and resumed the labour camp. It is a bold and unique curiosity in the history of the fantasies that has made the famous Butte [Montmartre] dear to Parisians. It is the Taverne du Bagne. Not perched up high like the Moulin-de-la-Galette, but much more accessible! Not at all pretentious or proud, like that cathedral, but attracting a good number of other pilgrims and gay Companions, the ordinary pilgrims of the Taverne du Bagne!' (Lisbonne, 1885)²

The tavern sought out scandal, and humorously parodied the conditions of the forced labour camps in New Caledonia. Waiters dressed up as convicts with balls and chains. According to William Morris, who had meetings in the tavern during his visit to Paris for the 1889 Workers Congress, customers could pay to be put in irons themselves for a fee of 1 1/2 francs ('though', he added, 'I don't know what charge is made for taking off the irons' (Morris, 1889: 242). Huge paintings adorned the walls, graphically depicting brutal conditions in the labour camps, as well as the bloody execution of various revolutionaries. Waiters greeted bourgeois visitors with insolence and raucous insults. In order to leave, visitors had to show a certificate of liberation (Larousse, 1890: 650). One newspaper described the cabaret:

[T]he strange building rises on the site of a demolished house. The exterior offers a sketchy assembly of boards and windows, and you penetrate the interior through a distinctly sinister, narrow corridor - when it is possible to enter at all (since crowds are always rushing in). You then find yourself in a vast room where

customers group around wooden tables ... The general feel is of a prison canteen, and oil lamps complete the illusion by spreading a smoky light around this bizarre decor (Anon., 1885).³

Another observer described the atmosphere:

'A seedy light fell from the ceiling and a few dirty glass lanterns were hung on the pillars ... As soon as the door opened, you were received with torrents of insults ... Waiters had the aura of bandits, a three-day beard ... From time to time they lingered by the shoulders of the lovely ladies, breathing their perfume, offering these doves the shiver of the guillotine' (Grand-Carteret, 1886).⁴

The house journal set the tone by parodying the language of penal discourses:

'Staff, condemned to serve in the tavern, have been picked from former Officials, Traders, Industrialists, Financiers, Property owners, Priests, Monks, and Friars, who are suffering their sentences in order to live honestly ... All you who have entered the penal colony - and who, moreover, have got out again - thank you for the constant kindness with which you have treated the convicts ... You have helped in the rehabilitation of the fallen, the moralization of rogues' (Lisbonne, 1885).⁵

The humour here is satirical and grotesque, parodying authoritative biopolitical discourses around criminality, degeneracy, recidivism, and rehabilitation, and denouncing contemporary figures of elite authority as the true criminals in a world whose values have been turned upside down. There is also a politics of knowledge at play, since the performances, paintings, and the spatial décor made visible the violence at the heart of the city of Paris. This was in a wider cultural context of a 'politics of forgetting' in which memories and traces of the urban violence following the Paris Commune were deliberately erased in art and popular culture (Wilson, 2007). Representations and re-enactments of violence at the Taverne du Bagne were a sensational violation of this aesthetics of knowledge. In this respect, we can see the Taverne du Bagne reactivating aspects of the Cynic ethics of truth. The paintings of murders of anarchists on the walls, the dramatization of the Communards' exile to forced labour camps, the inversion of social hierarchies and of discourses around criminality and degeneracy, all resurfaced the memory of the violence underlying the social order of the Third Republic.

One sees here a reactivation of the Cynic 'king of derision'. Indeed, the Tavern explicitly played with subverting figures of sovereignty. One newspaper described a cabaret performance staged by Lisbonne in which all the tavern's staff were dressed as historical Kings of France. Customers could be served a beer by a King of their choice. 'Always original, [Lisbonne] started off by dressing

his waiters as Kings of France. It's funny, especially since the poor devils are very uncomfortable serving in these historical outfits, but the public has the satisfaction of getting a beer from Charles IX or Louis XIV' (Anon., 1886).⁶ As sections of the audience grew increasingly rowdy, the play ended in an 'an infernal ruckus... the audience exchanging punches as they left'.⁷

Parrhesia, you will recall, postulates that the truth is not given to the subject by right; the subject must work upon herself in order to demonstrate her integrity and worthiness to speak the truth. It has three aspects: a search for a speaker considered truthful; testing the speaker's authority; and the affective relations of care binding the participants (Luxon, 2013). In the truth-telling associated with the tavern, we see elements of each of these three movements of parrhesia at play. We also see the central importance of place and atmosphere in the performance of parrhesia.

First, the tavern asserted anarchists' worthiness to speak the truth through the sincerity and authenticity of their encounters with violence (both revolutionary violence and the violence of the state). The suffering of Communards who had been deported to the penal colonies was dramatized through the satirical staging of the tavern as a forced labour camp, as well as by the huge paintings on the walls depicting the execution of Communards. The use of parody and irony conveyed a sense of a world unmoored and reversed, where those placed in positions of authority were criminals and corrupt, and those condemned as criminals were those who strove to live a just, moral, autonomous life. Far from manifesting a lack of sincerity, humour was a way of conveying autonomy and authenticity in a society where values had been turned upside down.

Second, the testing of authority came in the humorous encounters that were staged between anarchists and bourgeois visitors. Anarchists risked themselves by hurling insults and threats at their bourgeois visitors; their visitors risked themselves in courageously visiting a space, filled with 'criminals' and subversives, in which they would be ridiculed, insulted, and perhaps threatened. Finally, affective bonds were built and tested. The use of humour softened the confrontational nature of the encounter and created a community of humour who were in on the joke (Lockyer and Pickering, 2008). Humour generated affective bonds connecting parrhesiast and interlocutor, even as it foregrounded the danger of their encounter.

Place had a vital part to play in this game of parrhesia. The site of parrhesia was a carefully stage-manged, theatrical space, in which truth could be dramatized with the greatest possible effect. A humorous affective atmosphere was engineered through smoky light, dingy corridors, artworks, fancy dress, role play, and the use of humour to transgress social boundaries, such that elites could be greeted with insults and derision. It was a space that existed between the anarchist world and the bourgeois world –half-way between Paris and Montmartre. Anarchists could claim it as an authentic anarchist space, but bourgeois visitors could visit and enjoy the thrill of an encounter with the underworld, without feeling in genuine danger. As the anarchist were aware,

there was constant police surveillance. If this created a certain ambiguity – it can't be seen easily as an authentic space of anarchist resistance, nor merely as a bourgeois space of consumption – then the theory of parrhesia enables us to see that this is precisely what enabled the game of truth-telling to take place. However, the truths were targeted at Paris as a whole, evoking memories of the Commune, and evoking future uprisings.

The use of humour in parrhesia had obvious limitations. The dominant political values of the Republic emphasized seriousness, sobriety, and reason (Lehning, 2001), such that humour could easily be dismissed as a mere diversion, rather than a serious intervention. Its proponents could be dismissed as hysterics and degenerates (Lombroso, 1894). It is perhaps partly for this reason that the utopianism of 1880s cultural anarchism soon modulated into a more violent key, as the violent doctrine of 'propaganda by the deed' spread across Europe.

The Laughing Head of Revolt

A severed head gazes down from the foot of the guillotine at the howling crowd below. The head, frozen in rigor mortis and clotted with gore, has a terrifying laugh locked on its face. It is a cold, bitter laugh, with insults and derision on its lips. The head belongs to the anarchist bomber Ravachol, responsible for carrying out bombings in the bourgeois heartlands of Paris during the 1890s, in the name of 'propaganda by the deed' (Préposiet, 2005). Ravachol's execution in Montbrison elevated him to the status of a martyr in some anarchist circles, who celebrated Ravachol's heroic, courageous laughter in the face of death⁸:

'Ravachol: a saint was born to us ... Ravachol died with insults on his lips, ironic and contemptuous, disdainfully overlooking the vile crowd. Without fail, he scoffed at them with tragic laughter ... Oh! This laughter before the sinister machine ... it produces a funereal shiver. And the social whore at the foot of the scaffold is condemned forever, attacked by the sarcastic challenge of a criminal who has little care for politeness but brings an astonishing energy into action ... His jeering blasphemy unalterably frozen by the rictus of death, the beautiful and purified head of revolt remains, with I don't know what legendary authority' (Barrucand, 1892).⁹

Ravachol's severed head, then, was (in this influential account, at least) to become the surprising foundation of a new form of revolutionary authority. This derisory laughter, however, was different to the kinds of laughter associated with anarchism: the boisterous anarchist cafes, devoted to satire, parody, and the celebration of minor arts forms, such as the Taverne du Bagne.

In 1890s Europe, individual acts of violence started to become an infamous (and fiercely denounced by many anarchists) part of anarchists' attempt to overthrow the established order. In Paris, a series of attacks in the bourgeois heartlands created widespread panic, including

Ravachol's bombings of magistrates' houses, and other attacks on restaurants, cafes, the Chamber of Deputies, and in 1894, the assassination of Prime Minister Sadi Carnot. Whenever it caught a perpetrator, the state responded with its own forms of lethal violence: the guillotine.

Propaganda by the deed was one answer to the left's wrangling about the path to revolution. Whereas Engels had argued in the 1870s that a revolution without organisation and authority was impossible, anarchists insisted that no revolution could be carried out in authoritarian fashion. It was necessary, they argued, for the masses to make the revolution, not merely to support it. Thus, although many anarchists fiercely condemned these acts of violence, propaganda by the deed still seemed in some way 'to provide a framework for action which promised to expose the vulnerability of the bourgeois order without compromising anarchist principles of opposition to organization and authority. It could also be seen as a logical extension of a deep-seated belief in the importance of rebellion, and it adhered to the idea that man was by "nature" free, though everywhere in chains' (Fleming, 1980: 6).

In France, Ravachol quickly became a symbol of this violent shift. He was imprisoned and later sentenced to death for the bombings, as well as for other crimes including counterfeiting, grave-robbing, and murder (Dumas, 1981; Préposiet, 2005). Ravachol's execution elevated him to the status of a saint in some anarchist circles. The novelist Paul Adam called him modernity's 'Restorer of the Essential Sacrifice' (Adam, 1892).¹⁰ Strikingly, many accounts of Ravachol's trial and death remarked upon his smiles, smirks, and 'nervous, convulsive laughter' during his trial and execution (Anon., 1892: 176).¹¹ Anarchist sympathisers, by contrast, celebrated Ravachol's heroic, courageous laughter in the face of death.

There is no humour in this laughter. There is, however, a strong element of the *grotesque*, an aesthetic genre that has close affiliations with humour. The grotesque involves a shocking intrusion of corporeality. As Bakhtin (1984) characterises it, the grotesque body is characterized by excess, openness, pain, pleasure, dismemberment and profanity, and it holds potential to disrupt authoritative discourses. The guillotine, despite being associated with modernity, efficiency, and rationality, produced bodies that were not just dead, but grotesque (Smith, 2003). Dismemberment, dissection, and bodily fluids are emblems of the grotesque body – and unavoidable outputs of the guillotine. Specifically, Bakhtin's analysis highlights the importance of the grotesque face and the gaping mouth. Thus the guillotine, which decapitated the victim, whose head was held up to the crowd by the executioner, focused attention on what Smith (2003) calls 'a crucial node of semiotic ambivalence', and in this case, it focused attention on Ravachol's derisory laughter.

The dramatization of parrhesia in this example occurs across a number of spaces: the bombings themselves; the trial of Ravachol in Montbrison; Ravachol's execution; and the lurid accounts of

Ravachol's exploits in assorted newspapers, pamphlets, journals, and illustrations. The bombings themselves were notable for their infraction into the bourgeois spaces of Paris. In contrast to the usual association of workers' revolts with specific areas of the city (such as Montmartre and Belleville), Ravachol's acts of violence carried anarchist propaganda into the elite spaces of the city, profoundly shifting the geographies of revolt, such that revolt was immanent within the entire city. Such violence was very controversial within the anarchist community. Its legitimacy had to be bolstered through a simultaneous focus on the space of the body, specifically Ravachol's heroic, dismembered body: its gestures; the uncanny vitality of the decapitated head; and the grotesque intrusion of a disembodied laughing mouth amidst the flow of bodily fluids. The grotesque, dismembered, laughing body became a vital space of truth.

The heroization of Ravachol's laughter can be seen in the context of the first movement of parrhesia: the attempt to prove the protagonist's worthiness of the truth. Representations of Ravachol's sacrificial laughter celebrated his acts of revolt as demonstrations of courage, authenticity, and sincerity. Ravachol carefully performed this courage from the moment of his arrest. In his written defence speech, Ravachol wrote: '[Y]ou, members of the jury, will doubtless sentence me to death, because you think it is necessary, and that my death will be a source of satisfaction for you who hate to see human blood flow; but when you think it is useful to have it flow in order to ensure the security of your existence, you hesitate no more than I do, but with this difference: *you do it without running any risk, while I, on the other hand, acted at the risk of my very life.*' (Pouget, 1892, emphasis added). Ravachol's laughter, dramatizing vital fearlessness in face of death, expresses a worthiness to speak the truth, based on his courageous willingness to risk his life. Through laughter, as mediated by the anarchist press, Ravachol performs a grotesque saintliness that is steeped in irony: not humorous irony, but a bitter, derisory irony that denounces the distance between the true, just world and the existing, topsy-turvy world.

The second movement of parrhesia is testing the authority of the parrhesiast and her interlocutor. All the elements of Ravachol's actions (the bombings, the trial, and the execution) testified to an agonistic relationship between parrhesiast and the state – though this was of course marked by violence on both sides, and hence a breakdown of authority. What complicates this picture, however, is the fact that anarchist violence, whilst testifying to a total breakdown of trust in the authority of the state, was a form of truth-telling that was targeted at the working-class, rather than at the state. The key interlocutor, in other words, was the anonymous masses, not the spectacular state.

Here it is helpful to dwell further on the anarchist doctrine of propaganda by the deed (Fleming, 1980; Préposiet, 2005). This was the idea that anarchist politics of truth should work through acts and not just words. The test of an act of parrhesia, therefore, was anarchists' capacity to

awaken the spirit of revolt. This was a militant shock to thought, awakening the dormant spirit of revolt. Anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin (who opposed Ravachol's violence) wrote:

'The awakening of the revolutionary spirit always took place in such a manner that, at first, single individuals, deeply moved by the existing state of things, protested against it, one by one ... Then, little by little, small groups came to be imbued with the same spirit of revolt ... frequently also without any hope of success: simply because the conditions grew unbearable. Not one, or two, or tens, but hundreds of similar revolts have preceded and must precede every revolution' (Kropotkin, 1970).

The test of anarchist truth-telling was its capacity to bring about a kind of revolutionary affective contagion. The truths that needed telling, therefore, were not representational, easily articulated truths. Rather, they were truths that had to be apprehended at affective, unconscious, and imaginative levels. As the anarchist poet Pierre Quillard put it: 'consciously or not—but what does it matter?— whoever communicates the secret splendour of his dream to his brothers in suffering, acts on the society around him in the manner of a solvent, making outlaws and rebels of all those who understand him (often without their knowledge)' (Quillard, 1892: 150-151). Propaganda by the deed, then, was a form of non-representational truth-telling that committed itself to awakening individuals' immanent capacities to encounter the truth for themselves. As Quillard put it: 'a conception that is slightly confused allows the miraculous roses of the unconscious to flourish in their fierce and savage freedom.'¹² Anarchist propaganda by the deed was a form of truth-telling where the aim was to stimulate an imaginative encounter with the truth, rather than impose a clearly stated truth claim. Truth, in other words, was deeply embodied, and hence spatial. Truth was woven into the fabric of the everyday spaces of the city itself. When knowledge was conceived of as deed, not word, it could erupt throughout the city, without being confined to the safe spaces of conventional authoritative discourse. Violent revolt could generate a form of vital, living knowledge that was immanent to the urban environment itself: 'The idea', wrote Paul Brousse, '... will walk, alive, in flesh and bone, before the people. The people will hail it as it passes' (Brousse, 1877: 2).¹³

The form of truth-telling expressed by Ravachol's laughter also expresses an important element of the third movement of parrhesia: the affective relations of care between the truth-teller and her interlocutor. Ravachol's laughter expresses contempt and derision towards the state, and towards the crowd celebrating his death. Whereas the kind of humour analysed earlier in our discussion of the Taverne du Bagne could build mutual affective ties between anarchists and the customers at the tavern, the contemptuous laughter of Ravachol's severed head could only heighten a sense of antagonism to capitalist society. Yet this contemptuous revolt aimed at

triggering a far more utopian set of affective relations (as Kropotkin made clear), where individual acts of revolt would trigger a shift in society's imagination, and enable new forms of solidarity with and care for workers and marginalized members of society.

Conclusions

This paper has shown how acts of violence (both state violence and anarchist violence) were linked to humour and laughter through cultural practices, performances, and representations that deployed techniques including satire, parody, and the grotesque. According to Foucault, as we have seen, the grotesque is an important aspect of the modern power over life and death, one that brings laughter and violence into close proximity. However, the grotesque could also be argued to have been used by Cynics such as Diogenes in order to find new ways of speaking truth to power. This form of grotesque, we have seen, was a powerful device for speaking truth to power in late nineteenth century anarchism.

This paper has made three key contributions to geographical debate. First, it has extended and applied Foucault's theorisation of parrhesia, exploring (in line with Foucault's own speculations, which he did not explore in any depth), how it can be applied to the militant cultures of 19th century revolutionaries (see also Anonymized). In doing so, it has foregrounded the *geographies* of parrhesia. Through spatial analyses of the parodic, satirical and grotesque affective atmospheres of the anarchist Taverne du Bagne, and through analysis of irony and grotesque in the various spaces of anarchist propaganda by the deed (most importantly, the space of everyday life, and the space of the body), the paper has set out a new agenda for analysing modern geographies of resistance, truth, and power.

Second, the paper has intervened in geographies of humour and geographies of authority, by arguing for the importance of attending more closely to relations of authority (rather than power more generally) in analyses of the spatialities of humour and laughter. In doing so, it has also extended emerging geographies of experiential authority by highlighting the importance of analysing authority in terms of all three elements of authoritative truth-telling (the search for a person worth of speaking the truth; the agonistic testing of authority; and the development of affective relations of care), rather than remaining at one of these levels of analysis.

Third, it has contributed to a non-representational historical geography of modernity by offering a new analysis of spaces of anarchist truth-telling, one that emphasizes the importance of non-representational truths in early forms of anarchist resistance. In opposition to dominant positivist and scientific conceptions of the truth, I have argued, anarchist humour, laughter and violence deployed affective, unconscious, and imaginative forms of truth-telling. In doing so, I

hope to show that non-representational spatial practices have played a vital role in the genealogy of modern radical politics.

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¹ Peter Sloterdijk (1987) discerns in the Cynics a 'pantomimic materialism' that is set against the cunning dialectics of the Socratics: Cynicism refuted the language of the philosophers with the capers of a clown. It 'represent[ed] the popular, plebeian rejection of the official culture by means of irony and sarcasm'. Most importantly, it tackled afresh the question of how to say the truth, speaking truth to power through a brute materialism, a 'dialogue of flesh and blood' (1987:104). Where Sloterdijk dissolves Cynic violence in laughter and harmony with the world cosmos, Foucault, by contrast, seeks to account for the violence of Cynic rhetoric by proposing a concrete, intersubjective model of truth-telling grounded in the virtues of courage and magnanimity (the parrhesiastic game) and by positing violence as a realistic consequence of courageous criticism (Shea, 2010).

² 'Entre Paris et Montmartre, à mi-montée des Martyrs, l'ex-forçat Maxime Lisbonne, vient de ressusciter et de résumer la Bagne. C'est une hardiesse et une curiosité uniques dans l'histoire des fantaisies qui ont rendu fameuse la Butte chère aux Parisiens; C'est la Taverne du Bagne. Point haut perchés, comme le Moulin-de-la-Galette, mais autrement accessible! Point prétentieuse, ni orgueilleuse, comme la N.-D., du même nom, mais attirant une bien autre quantité de Pèlerins. Et de gais Compagnons, les Pèlerins ordinaires de la Taverne du Bagne !

³ 'Fondée par le citoyen Lisbonne, jadis directeur du légendaire théâtre des Bouffes-du Nord, l'étrange baraque s'élève sur l'emplacement d'une maison démolie. L'extérieur offre un assemblage sommaire de planches et de vitrages et l'on pénètre à l'intérieur, lorsqu'on peut y pénétrer (car la foule se presse aux abords), par un étroit couloir tout à fait sinistre. On se trouve alors dans une vaste salle où les consommateurs sont groupés autour de tables de bois. Sur les murs, des tableaux, dus à des artistes sans parti pris, représentent les principaux acteurs de la Commune. L'aspect général est celui d'un réfectoire de prison, et des quinquets à l'huile complètent l'illusion en répandant sur cette décoration bizarre une Lumière fumeuse.'

⁴ 'Un jour louche tombait du plafond et quelques lanternes aux vitres sales étaient accrochées aux piliers ... dès que la porte s'ouvrait, chacun était reçu par des bordés d'injures et "en prenait pour son grade" comme on dit aujourd'hui. C'était une vraie fontaine de purin. ... Les garçons avaient tous des airs de bandits, une barbe de trois jours. Ils savaient marcher dans les entraves avec leurs gros sabots. Mais parfois, ils se penchaient sur les épaules des belles dames en respirant leurs parfums pour donner à ces colombes le frisson de la guillotine'

⁵ 'Entre Paris et Montmartre, ... l'ex-forçat Maxime Lisbonne, vient de ressusciter et de résumer le Bagne. C'est une hardiesse et une curiosité unique dans l'histoire des fantaisies qui ont rendu fameuse la Butte chère aux Parisiens ... Le personnel, attaché au service de la Taverne, a été choisi parmi des anciens Fonctionnaires, Négociants, Industriels, Financiers, Propriétaires, Prêtres, Frères, Ignorantins, qui, ayant subi leur peine qu'à vivre honnêtement ... Vous tous, que êtes entrés au Bagne - et qui, pourtant, en êtes sortis - merci pour la constante bienveillance avec laquelle vous avez traité les forçats ... Vous avez aidé au relèvement des déçus, à la moralisation des dévoyés.'

⁶ 'Toujours original, il a commencé par vêtir ses garçons en rois de France. C'est drôle, d'autant plus que les pauvres diables s'ont fort bien à l'aise pour servir avec ses costumes historiques. Mais enfin le public a la satisfaction de se faire apporter un bock par Charles IX ou par Louis XIV ... C'est une pochade assez drôle où il y a beaucoup de revolvers mais pas un mot de politique.'

⁷ '[U]n certain nombre de 'boudinés' qui se trouvaient dans la salle n'ont cessé de chanter, hurler et siffler pendant toute la représentation ... La toile est tombée au milieu d'un redoublement de cris et d'applaudissements, et le public s'est écoulé en échangeant quelques coups de poing.'

⁸ There is a long tradition of performances of defiance before an execution. Compare, for example, Rediker's Rediker M. (2004) *Villains of all nations: Atlantic pirates in the golden age*: Verso. account of the execution of the pirate William Fly, who taught the hangman a lesson in how to tie knots correctly.

⁹ 'Ravachol, un Saint nous est né ... Ravachol est mort l'insulte à la bouche, ironique et méprisant, dominant de son dédain la foule vile. Sans une défaillance, il a bafoué de son rire tragique ceux qui se frappaient eux-mêmes avec l'arme à deux tranchants dont ils jouaient pour leur défense ... Oh ! ce rire devant la sinistre machine ... - il donne le frisson funèbre ; et la catin sociale, au pied de l'échafaud, atteinte par le sarcasme et le défi d'un criminel peu soucieux de politesse mais qui apporte dans l'action une énergie si surprenante, est à jamais flétrie ... Son gouaillieur blasphème immuablement figé par le rictus de la mort, la tête du révolté, belle et purifiée, demeure, avec je ne sais quelle autorité légendaire.'

¹⁰ "Renovateur du Sacrifice Essentiel"

¹¹ 'Ravachol éclata d'un rire nerveux, convulsif'.

¹² 'Pour savoir très exactement ce que l'on veut, il ne faut vouloir que des choses médiocres et se représenter le monde comme un catalogue banal de magasin de nouveautés. Un désir précis se trouve restreint par cela même, tandis qu'une conception un peu confuse laisse s'épanouir en leur farouche et sauvage liberté les roses miraculeuses de l'inconscience.'