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Free Speech and Digital Discourse in Nicola Barker's *H(A)PPY*

ABSTRACT
Nicola Barker's *H(A)PPY* (2017) depicts a dystopian future in which all speech is monitored and regulated. Politically dubious topics are flagged, metanarratives like religion and history are censored, and even words expressing heightened emotional states are marked as dangerous. Barker uses innovative techniques to visualise the warping of language under conditions of totalitarian surveillance. In analysing Barker's novel, this paper applies the findings of digital discourse studies to the novel's content while arguing that its experimental techniques reflect a distinct break from the digital information stream. Barker's innovations are a formal route to escape the deadlock of our current politics.
Keywords: Digital writing, graphic surface, free speech, dystopia, experimental writing, Nicola Barker

Nicola Barker's *H(A)PPY* was published in 2017, winning the Goldsmiths Prize that year for its innovative approach to the novel form. It is a dystopian novel set in an unspecified future where an automated System monitors the language of each citizen – known collectively as the Young – and charts their word usage on a Graph. Their Graphs are visible to all, and are monitored in the hope of maintaining a language without any deep, unusual, or extreme thoughts. The world of *H(A)PPY* is uncomplicatedly happy. The problem is with its protagonist, who is not. Through the use of innovative graphic devices including coloured words, alterations in font, and musical notation, *H(A)PPY* immerses the reader in the protagonist's own dangerous stream-of-consciousness and, as the novel progresses, into her confused half-formed philosophy as well. It is a novel that, more than anything, makes a clear case for free speech, and warns of the dangers of algorithmically-driven language policing. Yet, being written in a complex contemporary climate in which, among other dramatic changes, the defence of free speech has shifted from a primarily left-wing to a primarily right-wing issue, the politics of the novel itself are often, as a result, provocative in their implications.

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In this paper I hope to unpack the politics of *H(A)PPY* by using contemporary digital media theory, drawing attention to its uncomfortable location between political poles, before making a case for its innovative use of graphic devices and musical metonymy as a way of transcending the political and aspiring to a language untrapped by political discourse.

The reception of the novel demonstrates its uncomfortable political status. Barry (2018), winner of the 2016 Goldsmiths Prize, described the novel as a "work of vaulting ambition" that "extrapolates madly to make a language for an utterly believable future, a world enslaved by technology". Jordan (2017), writing in *The Guardian*, called Barker's work "as gnomic, terrifying and glorious as ever", while interpreting the techno-censorship of *H(A)PPY* as being satirical: "the novel both satirises the Information Stream and is wholeheartedly plugged into it". In *The Financial Times*, Tonkin (2017) also considered the world depicted in *H(A)PPY* to be a satire, although in his view its "dictatorship of niceness, enforced by The System, [is] a gloves-off satire on 'Generation Snowflake'". We can see in these three positive reviews three very different interpretations of the novel. For Jordan, it is a satire on modernity, on the love-hate relationship of people to the internet, while for Tonkin it is clearly a satire on the people themselves, the new generation who are emotionally underdeveloped. Barry, writing on the Goldsmiths website and representing a voice for innovative writing, avoids the political question altogether in favour of taking the narrative seriously. These, roughly, are the three dialectical points that will shape our argument. Is *H(A)PPY* a satirical warning about the power of our new machines? Or, is it a warning about the new types of people who are using these machines? Or, is it an attempt to transcend this type of machinic discourse entirely and locate an alternative space of discourse?

In exploring the relationship between society, technology and language, *H(A)PPY* draws on a wealth of material from the dystopian tradition. The paring down of language – the flagging of dangerous words, highlighted in red type, and the limiting of all musical instruments to a standardised tuning – reminds us of Orwell's *1984* (1949). The figure of the lone discontent rebelling against the system also feels like *1984*, or Zamyatin's *We* (1924), which came before it. Closer to *H(A)PPY*'s message, however, is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and an earlier novel, *Man's World* (1926), by Charlotte Haldane. Haldane and Huxley's novels both feature a protagonist who, through an "irrational" interest in the culture of the past, rebels against the "happy" society in which they live, only to be castigated and driven to suicide (Firchow, 1975, p. 307). Both novels reflect "a society in which the values (or nonvalues) of scientific technology are dominant, [and] reduce man to a species of machine" (p. 303). Huxley in particular captures this world with an unflinching eye. The technological utopia of *A Brave New World* is appealing in many ways; it is not the obvious hellscape

of Orwell's Airstrip One. In writing the book, Huxley followed current trends in science to their logical conclusion, actively dissuading himself from passing moral judgement upon them. "The fact that one feels something should be so," he reasoned, "does not make it true" (Webster, 1934, p. 195). The result is an ambiguous and uncomfortable read. Although *H(A)PPY* does not quite reach Huxley's level of detached appreciation, Barker very clearly depicts her happy world as a boring one. We can find important parallels in her willingness to pursue scientific developments to a logical imaginative end and her refusal to impose on the world her own extraneous ideological biases. This is especially important when it comes to the question of language, as Barker shows us that Orwellian language-policing does not require an Orwellian state censor, but can emerge as a natural result of Huxleyan scientific development.

The final piece to the puzzle of Barker's dystopia comes in the form of postmodernism. Reaching its heyday in the 1980s and 1990s, postmodernism has been described by Ruland and Bradbury (1992) as reflecting "a moment of creative exhaustion, of labyrinthine aesthetic pluralism, or critical mystification, an age of decadence" (p. 427). Reflecting the rudderless self-criticism of Western intellectuals after the fall of communism, postmodernism perceived the world as consisting of a series of "narratives", each of which it sought to deconstruct. The clearest expression of the System's views in *H(A)PPY* is expressed in exactly these terms:

> The narratives of family and romance and adventure, the masculine and the feminine narratives, the narratives of class, of nationalism, of capitalism, of socialism, of faith and myth and mystery, historical narratives, science fiction narratives, experimental narratives, horror narratives, literary narratives […] The Sensor automatically deconstructs these stories for us [as] to understand them is to disable them (Barker, p. 45)[1].

The dystopian System that regulates the world of *H(A)PPY* thinks like a postmodernist and judges like one. As a result, the words that appear in the first part of the novel (flagged by the system and so presented to the reader printed in red ink), include both words to do with unhappiness ("unhealthy" [p. 9], "aggressive" [p. 28], and "regret" [p. 14]) and words that signify what postmodernists would describe as "metanarratives" ("History" [p. 1], "corporations" [p. 39], and "narrative" [p. 138] itself). By highlighting these words in red, Barker draws our attention to them before we even know why they are highlighted. In advance of the System's explanation, we are already seeking meaning in these highlighted words. The fact that some reflect pain or other strong emotions while others signify, or at least hint at, ideological convictions, means that we, as readers, begin to act as

[1] All subsequent references to Barker's text refer to the pagination in the 2017 Heinemann UK edition.

a censor ourselves. We are looking for the offense. That the "negative" words also include acquisitive feelings like "preciousness" (p. 23) and "competitive" (p. 3) demonstrates how the System is aligning all highly-wrought emotions – those that do not complement happiness – with narrativised thought and the ideologies of the "Past" (p. 1): itself a flagged word.

To understand Barker's integration of both Orwellian and Huxleyan tropes into her own dystopia, we must therefore also position the text against changes within public discourse driven by digitisation, social media and algorithmically-analysed speech. Orwell's vision of dystopia, it should be remembered, was one of a single-party state; a centralised authority with a rigid ideology. Barker's dystopia is equally rigid in its approach to language and thought control. Yet, as a postmodern System, her central authority presents itself as a post-ideological being, or even an anti-ideological one. To the reader, however, Barker makes clear that such post-ideological claims are themselves reflections of an ideological celebration of all things happy, peaceful, and good for self-esteem. The System is, by its very nature, exclusionary. And yet, one of the words it excludes through its flagging is "exclude" (p. 3). The System, we must conclude, is therefore thoroughly knowledgeable about the "old" ideologies, as it must know these systems inside and out in order to censor them and deconstruct their languages. Inside it, our protagonist is told, the System contains a "Map of All Narratives" (p. 41), which it uses to inform its flagging algorithm. The System therefore embodies the postmodern Party line. A concept celebrated by contemporary Marxist writer Jodi Dean (2016), the Party line reflects a "standpoint from outside the workers that workers can take toward their own condition" (p. 180). Ultimately, the Party line acts as an external force to which "workers" should submit in a psychological process of externalising their decision-making functions. For the modern Marxist, one must give up free choice in submission to a higher moral force. The Graph that represents the System's individual user-interface in *H(A)PPY* does not provide the user with information: it does not explain the line. Like the Party, it merely flags the words that should be avoided in order to maintain the line.

That *H(A)PPY*'s dystopia aligns with the desires of many contemporary left-wing thinkers gives credence to Tonkin's reading of the novel as an anti-leftist satire. That Jordan can claim the novel for the left, however, is also valid, provided we base our interpretation of left and right on pre-digital positions. Ultimately, Barker's novel is a defence of free speech. In recent years, free speech has switched from a left-wing to a right-wing talking point (Stoughton, 2018, p. 11). I argue that this is largely as a result of a change in social emphasis. The right typically predominates within institutional power arrangements, while the left predominates in culture. The internet has shifted emphasis away from institutional power, towards cultural power. As free speech is always the demand of the underdog, it follows that the right now defend their right

to speak within our culturally-driven discourse with the same vehemence that the left once defended its right to speak truth to institutional power. Marcuse (2015) once wrote that "all dialectic is liberation: […] liberation by virtue of the contradiction generated by the system, precisely because it is a bad, false system" (p. 175). His primary fear, expressed in *One-Dimensional Man*, was that institutional power would flatten language by submerging both the powerful and the powerless in an all-pervasive system. Such a system would be "a vicious circle that encloses both the Master and the Servant. Do the technicians rule, or is their rule that of the other, who rely on the technicians as their planners and executors?" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 33). Being a Marxist, Marcuse still associated this "other" with a shadowy group of elites, yet his writing opens up the more terrifying possibility that the "other" may simply be the system itself; in our case, a computer system. The System in Barker's dystopia is, after all, merely running its programmes. Technicians maintain it and there are powerful people whose role is to maintain the public's faith in it, but as a system it is one that performs its function thoughtlessly, and yet tirelessly.

Against this system, Barker presents us with a protagonist who breaches the limits of speech. She begins the novel by breaching the accepted limits of polite speech. She sets off a warning signal by spiking her Graph with too many red-flagged negative words. She begins to resent her Graph, finding ways to detach it, for example by staring directly into bright lights or by hiding in certain rooms. She uses these uncontrolled spaces to test the boundaries of unrestricted dialogue. At first, this provides catharsis. "I am not even entirely sure what these thoughts are," she thinks to herself, "they are so quick, so fleeting – but it feels good to release them – to unburden myself of them. Afterwards my mind vibrates like a metal string" (p. 25). What she is experiencing in her cathartic moments of non-compliance is a short burst of freedom. This freedom, however, is fleeting. Through it, she is made aware that there are ways of thinking and feeling which are not those of the "happy" System. What those alternative thoughts are, she has no language left that is capable of understanding. Every narrative is already deconstructed, yet she longs to live by one. In an era of compulsory postmodernism, however, such a longing must, by necessity, remain unspoken.

Barker explores these intuitions-beyond-words through the use of a musical set of analogies. Already, as her protagonist is unburdening herself, she refers to her mind vibrating "like a string" (p. 25). We will later find this metaphor expanded, revealing the string to be the string of an instrument, and the ideas that she seeks to be a type of music. She hears music in her dreams, music that "loses its course" (p. 210), wandering away from the standard tuning that is the only permitted tuning under the System. Confused, she interprets these intuitions as reflecting actual music, and so retunes her musical instrument – a West African kora – to its original tuning. The scales that she plays are no longer in harmony with the scales

of the other kora players in her kora group. This leads to a "correction" being offered to her by a fellow player:

> Kipp patted me on the shoulder. 'The tuning is in our hearts, Mira A,' he explained, smiling. 'Perfection is not about the instrument itself – its leather rings or its pegs – but how we, The Young, choose to respond to the instrument. The tuning fork is in our hearts (p. 59).

His line – "the tuning fork is in our hearts" (p. 59) – becomes a mantra for the protagonist. It at once reminds her of her "untuned" nature in comparison to the other "happy" ones of her society, and also that her nagging musical dreams are not, ultimately, about music, but about something else.

In her search for expression she eventually finds a musical piece. Under the System, musical pieces from the past have had their titles and authors replaced by numerical references. This is presumably, due to the large amount of music written for religious purposes or else written about excesses of love, grief or patriotism. The piece "91.51.9.81.81.1.2-14.9.02.91.12.7.1" is one that the protagonist finds particularly resonant and, after much scandalous searching within the historical records, she discovers that its title is "The Cathedral" (p. 219). This Cathedral obsesses her. She longs to hear the music and, during her dreams, she finds that the many unspoken, non-happy and therefore forbidden intuitions that lie on the verges of her thought all agglomerate into a symbolic Cathedral.

The image of the Cathedral is constructed from layers of detritus picked up by the protagonist on her helpless journey towards self-expression. In place of discourse, which is strictly regulated, she has had to construct an alternative viewpoint through the random assemblage of facts. Barker visualises this by combining mathematical symbols with religious ones, physical formulae with musical notation, and placing these together across a number of layers, with a darker foreground and a lighter background, giving the illusion of depth. The illusion of depth is indeed what is produced. The pages leading up to it are scattered with randomly interconnected thoughts: "8HZ: The frequency of the double helix in DNA replication" (p. 244), "in Lacanian algebra upper-case phi stands for the symbolic phallus" (p. 242), "Twelve-tone equal temperament = universally adopted in 18… in 18.. in 1953" (p. 238). Each contributes a mess of symbols and phrases that align into a Cathedral only through the rough resemblance of an outline. We, like Myra, see the Cathedral because we are primed to do so, but what it is made of now makes less sense than ever. All she knows is that it is "towering above us. Dark. Ancient. Remorseless. Terrifying" (p. 252). It is the culmination of her unscriptable thoughts; her intuitions beyond language. Like music, it signifies without words. It is an attempt at raw, unfiltered communication, in a world where the written exists purely as a subject of bad faith interrogation and deconstruction.

Arguably, the method that Barker's protagonist finds to express her unspeakable discomforts is a reflection of Barker's own stuckness when it comes to writing

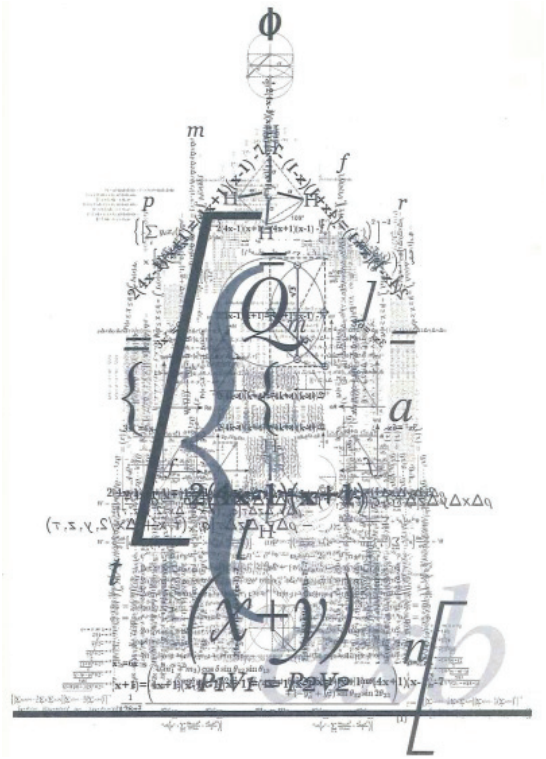


Figure 1: Mira A's image of the Cathedral (Barker, p. 253)

a political dystopia in the contemporary, digitised age. Her adoption of experimental techniques allows her a mode of expression unhampered by the deconstructable word. The question of what exactly Myra A wants is left unresolved, reflecting its fundamental irresolvability. Where John Savage may cling to his Shakespeare and Winston Smith writes "down with Big Brother" in his diary, Myra A constructs a fantasy Cathedral, of which she herself is afraid. Barker's protagonist is ultimately trapped in the position of a free speech advocate within a culture dominated by progressive ideas. The System is configured as both morally right and serving happiness, meaning that objection to it becomes, by default, an act of wilful immorality or wilful self-harm. The question of freedom arises, but only as a question predetermined by morality; of course you *could* believe otherwise, but why *would* you?

The enfolding of liberty by morality reflects a process of cultural digitisation described by Kirby (2009) as the creation of the "apparently real" (p. 140). The apparently real is a specifically digital aesthetic that "proffers what seems to be real, and that is all there is to it"; it "comes without self-consciousness, without irony or self-interrogation" (p. 140). The aesthetic is as equally valid to online roleplaying games as it is to message boards, social media or other performative

digital spaces. It represents a renewed post-postmodern sanctity of what is presented. To question what is presented is to break the spell of its existence, much like refusing to play along in an MMORPG or to refuse to recognise someone's dating profile picture as an accurate reflection of their appearance. To question is, under the new rules of the internet, to break a taboo, to not play along, or to cheat. Politically, we might understand the apparently real as either driving, or driven by, a newfound respect for performed identities. To question someone's identity is to commit a cardinal sin, and is perceived as an assault upon the very foundation of that individual's happiness. We can find the echoes of this in the quiet passivity of the Young with whom Mira A shares her world. Nobody in *H(A)PPY* seems to work. Authority is embedded in those who guide wavering souls back to the correct and "happy" way of thinking. Time is instead taken up by joining musical groups, resting, attending lectures, and walking neuro-mechanical pets. These are the "ideal netizen-prosumers" described by Lovink (2008) as "data-dandies that can freely stroll around the internet like it is one big game" (p. 120). Each of the activities partaken in by the Young are ludic in their structure. When Mira fails to play correctly, by detuning her instrument, for example, or failing to take care of her neuro-mechanical canine, she is taken aside and reminded of the rules. She is not "punished" in a traditional sense (disparaging language having been flagged by the System as unhappy) but she is patronised and treated as if she were a child. She is told that she is "experiencing some problems" (p. 121) and this makes others worry about her. Soon, she is told, "everything will return to normal again. Don't be impatient" (p. 121). The concern expressed, whether real or faux, is a result of her failure to play along.Mira's own transcendent vision of language evolves in dialogue with this performative mode of existence. The apparently real emerges on the internet due to the primarily linguistic nature of identity performance on the web. By introducing the Graph as a constantly visible, augmented-reality-type interface, the citizens of *H(A)PPY* translate their everyday discourse into something written. This is highlighted immediately in the novel through the use of red text to flag "unhappy" words. Yet it also takes physical form in a series of visual glitches and/or hallucinations that effect Mira as she grows increasingly divergent from the "happy" norm. The words she sees appear to her no longer as solid objects that are liable to set off the Graph's sensor, but as bubbles.

These bubbles, she dreams, either contain "souls" (p. 278) or are "souls" themselves. They are shimmering appearances that we must presume, like soap bubbles, are as fragile and impermanent as they are glimmering. They, like the performative identities of the "happy" Young, are entirely constituted of surface. Mira must respond to them as she does to the rest of her apparently real world; by acting as if they are solid and physical, even while their very appearance suggests otherwise. The alternative to playing along is shown in a separate dream, in which the words "devastated / rotten / abducted / Krishna" (p. 212) appear for a moment

Figure 2: Mira A's thought bubbles (p. 278)

only to burst. After the words withdraw into themselves, like popped balloons, all that remains is "a gap. A white space. It floated above her hands like a pale cloud and then turned into a dove and flew around the room. It was frantic. It slammed into the window" (p. 212). The presence of an absence lying behind the surface of happy words is represented as the terrifying Lacanian real. It contains a state of frenzy, of animal panic, that the apparently real buries, contains or covers over. To not play along, to reject the System, is to unleash this terrifying gap into the apparently solid meaning of the world. It is for this reason that the ludic structures of *H(A)PPY* have to be maintained. They insulate the Young from the horrifying responsibility to find existential meaning within the world's void.

It is suggested throughout *H(A)PPY* that the Young are the key to maintaining their own innocent and "perfect" state. By refusing to play along, and more specifically by thinking of the words red-flagged by her Graph, Mira A is told that she threatens not only herself and those around her but the entire system. "You will poison the Graph," a mentor, Kite, tells her, "you will pollute The Information Stream. You will imbalance the Sensor […] You will effectively declare war on The Young" (p. 46). It appears that the system of mental censorship embodied in the electronic System is merely the by-product of a series of algorithmical inputs generated from the Young themselves. Again, this breaks with the centralised bureaucratic forms of dystopia typified in Orwell and Huxley, and more closely aligns with contemporary digital forms of social mediation. As Sue Curry Jansen (1991) writes, large corporate actors define the accepted range of expression within any market-driven cultural forum, including the internet, and these actors orient

towards the forms that are most likely to produce profits. In doing this, they enlist marketing companies to canvas opinion and, by listening to the public voice and targeting it, corporate-driven media ultimately "assumes the mantle of mediators of public morals" (Jansen, 1991, p. 16). By designing products that appeal to the public taste, corporations help define the limits of public taste in their turn.

Where pre-internet marketing departments would enlist members of the general public to form consumer panels (typically skewing small-c conservative), internet-enabled marketing uses metrics driven by social media (which skews towards the loudest, more extreme voices). Corporate entities in a digitised world therefore mediate the public conversation in a manner that orientates more towards the progressive than the conservative. In *H(A)PPY*, Barker follows this process to its logical conclusion, where a society of infantilised adults have actively infantilised themselves by submitting to a technical system that, in turn, promotes submission back to them. The apparently real is an aesthetic that sits comfortably alongside such infantilisation. Wachter-Boettcher (2017) has described the recent trend for progressive corporate marketing as "paternalistic playfulness" that "makes us childlike" (p. 114) by telling us what's best for us in an unmistakably patronising tone. Coetzee, writing in the 1970s, when free speech was a primarily left-wing concern, also condemned the tendency towards patronising paternalism evident in attempts to clean-up speech. As Coetzee (1996) phrased it: "innocence is a state in which we try to maintain our children; dignity is a state we claim for ourselves" (p. 14). The aesthetic of the apparently real is precisely not to claim dignity for ourselves. It is to knowingly set reality aside and live in a consciously limited state of unknowing. Such unknowing is believed to facilitate social wellbeing and the happiness of others. The Young are therefore simultaneously the result of and the producers of, and perhaps even the *enforcers* of, their own state of innocence. The role of the experienced adult who was traditionally tasked with protecting innocence has been outsourced to the System and its algorithms.

The question remains as to how and why such a person as Mira A comes to exist in a society as rigorously self-ordered as the one depicted in *H(A)PPY*. If the System is merely a mirror of the desires of each individual, measured algorithmically and thus becoming a collective will, then why does Barker's protagonist not recognise herself in the call? If the System calling out to her is built from her own desires and interests, why does the interpellation fall short? Barker shuns the trope of the damaged or resentful individual. Mira A is a genial and polite woman. She is not one of Huxley's sub-Alphas or the visibly sick Winston Smith. In fact, outside of her nagging doubts about the System, she appears quite content with her place in the world and, if anything, she is worried more about losing her present happiness than about finding the truth behind the Graph. Her "war with the System" appears to be compulsive, driven by curiosity, rather than an act of conscious rebellion.

To understand Mira A's non-compliance we can again look to the effects that digitisation has had upon discourse. In early studies of internet messaging between strangers – forums, message boards and comment sections – rhetoricians located a set of recurring phenomena including: "overcompliance with group norms, unnecessarily aggressive behaviour, a decline in the quality of deliberation, gender marginalisation, and technological elitism" (Warnick, 1998, pp. 74–75). Over time, the shared message boards of the internet fragmented into distinct communities aligned around shared interests and, increasingly, around shared politics. Yet, even within the "echo chambers" of modern internet discourse, where everyone ostensibly agrees with each other, or should, there remains a recurrent undertone of "criticism, carping, condemnation [and] complaint" (Kirby, 2009, p. 107). It would appear that there is something in internet discourse that drives its speakers towards aggression and resentment. As much as the performance of identity locks speakers into an "overcompliance with group norms", it also simultaneously creates a forbidden outgroup – one who must exist in silence, repelled by the discourse – and sets in motion an intensive process of boundary policing. This may be to do with the nature of digital language. David Crystal (2007) has described how such language is "something completely new. It is neither 'spoken writing' nor 'written speech' […] it is something fundamentally different" (p. 272). From our position as readers interested in matters of free speech and censorship, the overlap of written and spoken forms of language may hold the key to much of this contradictory "arguing over agreements". The matter appears to be one of tone and content. Tone, being largely communicated by voice and body language, belongs to the spoken, and therefore to casual and everyday speech. Without tone, one relies upon content. On the internet, the apparently real demands that we treat messages as speech – they should be conversational, unpretentious and immediate – and yet, being written, opponents will rigorously analyse and dissect the content of these statements as if they were formal academic writing. In digital discourse we therefore end up with the worst of both the written and the spoken. There is the imperative to use language informally; but this language will then be held to rigorous formal standards.

By outsourcing the role of rigorous formal adjudicator to the algorithmic System, the citizens of *H(A)PPY* have effectively compartmentalised and repressed their own compulsion towards aggressive boundary policing. Nevertheless, they still exist within a language system mediated digitally, and so the treading of boundaries no doubt remains a compulsion for many citizens; especially because, as Mira A is discovering, the act of maintaining a performed identity requires the active silencing of many elements of the human condition. As Marcuse (1964) describes,

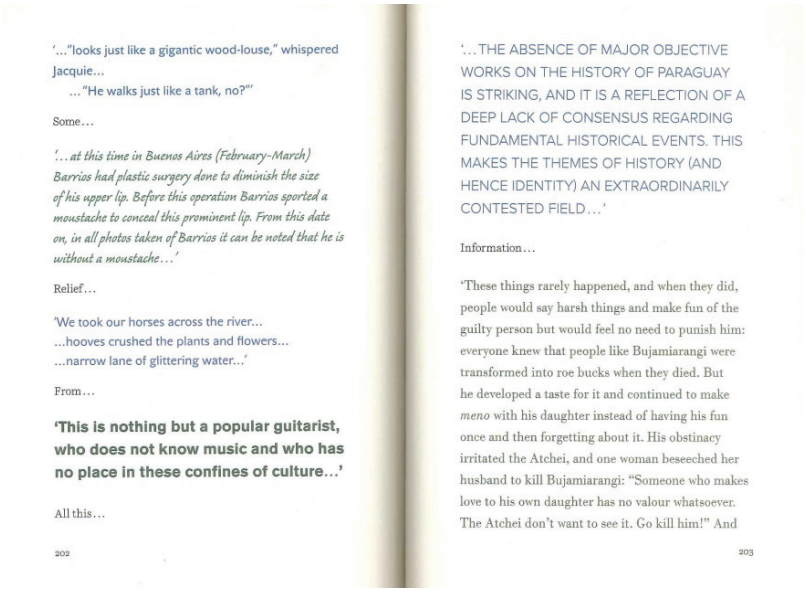
> the language which the man on the street actually speaks is the language which expresses his behaviour; it is therefore the token of concreteness. However, it is also a token of false concreteness […] for it is a purged language (p. 174).

The happy speech that is spoken by the happy people of *H(A)PPY* is a similarly purged language. The Graph flags not only aggressive or hateful speech, but any speech connected to outdated "narratives"; a category including all philosophical systems and nearly all abstract thought. The "concreteness" of everyday speech is such because it lacks the function of abstraction. In a state of innocence, the fully interpellated citizens of *H(A)PPY* can inhabit this concreteness as a form of blissful immanence. For Mira, made curious by the "Well Balanced" (p. 15) character Kite who seems, for all his "calm resignation and deep renunciation" (p. 15), to contain something of the transcendent, the limits of the language permitted by the Graph are felt to be restraints. To understand whether there is anything beyond the apparently real requires an unfiltered language to explore with, yet such a language contains the possibility of contradiction and therefore dialectic, and the dialectic brings the end of the static, unmoving, undeveloped and innocent state of happy immanence.

Barker displays this fraying at the corners of happy language through the imposition of outside texts onto the page. The page may reflect the protagonist's thoughts, or perhaps her sight as she encounters texts in the archives. At first, the impositions from outside of the Graph come like an unstoppable flow:

The black text in Times New Roman font is the voice of the protagonist. We can see how she feels washed away by this information flow, her voice breaking in between quotations as if she is coming up, breathless, for air; "Some […] Relief […] From […] All this […] Information…" (pp. 202–203). Meanwhile, an array of green and blue text in a variety of fonts – cursive for historical, all-caps for official, bold for a judgement – fill the page with an uncontrolled flow of information about Paraguay. It is all loosely connected to the musician in whom she is interested. The pursuit of the transcendent (signified by music) has led her to wallow in the unfiltered, unsorted and seemingly endless torrent of raw information. It is the Information Stream that constitutes the internet and, by extension, represents human knowledge more generally. She buries herself in written languages, in digitised books, and spoken languages, in audio and video recordings, only to feel herself losing more and more of her apparently real identity with each new piece of media. By removing the boundary, she has opened herself to unmediated discourse. She is experiencing an opening of all boundaries. A form of negative transcendence.

We must therefore conclude that Barker's intention with *H(A)PPY* is to show a society that cannot persist in functioning. Where Orwell and Huxley's protagonists are aberrations that, we are told, the system will soon eradicate, Mira A is an almost fully content member of the System's ideal society who is led to declare "war on the System" (p. 251) as a result of the repressive mechanisms of the System itself. Her journey begins, after all, when she notices the red highlighted text that marks out her thoughts as unhappy ones. The Graph, which



'...''looks just like a gigantic wood-louse,'' whispered Jacquie...
...''He walks just like a tank, no?''''

Some...

'...at this time in Buenos Aires (February-March) Barrios had plastic surgery done to diminish the size of his upper lip. Before this operation Barrios sported a moustache to conceal this prominent lip. From this date on, in all photos taken of Barrios it can be noted that he is without a moustache...'

Relief...

'We took our horses across the river...
...hooves crushed the plants and flowers...
...narrow lane of glittering water...'

From...

'This is nothing but a popular guitarist, who does not know music and who has no place in these confines of culture...'

All this...

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'...THE ABSENCE OF MAJOR OBJECTIVE WORKS ON THE HISTORY OF PARAGUAY IS STRIKING, AND IT IS A REFLECTION OF A DEEP LACK OF CONSENSUS REGARDING FUNDAMENTAL HISTORICAL EVENTS. THIS MAKES THE THEMES OF HISTORY (AND HENCE IDENTITY) AN EXTRAORDINARILY CONTESTED FIELD...'

Information...

'These things rarely happened, and when they did, people would say harsh things and make fun of the guilty person but would feel no need to punish him: everyone knew that people like Bujamiarangi were transformed into roe bucks when they died. But he developed a taste for it and continued to make *meno* with his daughter instead of having his fun once and then forgetting about it. His obstinacy irritated the Atchei, and one woman beseeched her husband to kill Bujamiarangi: "Someone who makes love to his own daughter has no valour whatsoever. The Atchei don't want to see it. Go kill him!" And

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Figure 3: A double page showing Mira in the Information Stream (p. 202–203)

acts as a visible trace of the progressive-corporate nexus of repression, leads Mira A towards her understanding of the apparently real as a constructed reality, a ludic structure, and her inevitable break with the System that takes the form of a return of the repressed. Kite, despite his superficial compliance, is disappeared before Mira, suggesting that he too grew "unhappy" once he understood the foundation of his "happiness". Any too-full understanding, any attempt to put aside innocence and regain dignity, renders the citizen incompatible with the System and results in their decoupling. The System seems to have this flaw built into it; it is based upon it, in fact. Perhaps, in this way, Barker is suggesting that the Young must cast aside their youth in the name of existential honesty. Or perhaps she is merely satirising the imperative towards happy Youth that our modern digital utopians and political puritans view as a moral good. The text is ambiguous. All that is certain is that her use of experimental techniques is what creates this ambiguity, and it is a useful ambiguity; one that does much to shake loose the clotted moralisms of our age.

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