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### Author

Pach, Walter

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Imagining Democracy, Punishment, and Infinity:

Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Carceri d'invenzione*

### Abstract

Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) was an Italian architect, artist, and classist. His views of Rome have been known globally for their artistic quality, photorealism, and their imaginary perspectives of ancient monuments. Piranesi influenced many neoclassical artists and experimented with the usage of space and vastness in a way that preempted the Impressionist exploration of light. His “Imaginary Prisons” influenced many Romantic and Gothic authors and have become the topic of much scholarship in modernity. This essay explores how Piranesi’s choice of aesthetics and content were influenced and influenced Enlightenment thought surrounding punishment, pain, and democratic imaginations of identity. Throughout, Michel Foucault’s history and theoretical approach to the development and use of torture in the west is explored through the lens of Piranesi and contemporaneous thought. Piranesi’s influence continues in subtle remarks in various canonical texts and authors, such as De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum,” Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, Franz Kafka, and Jorge Luis Borges. This essay explores the historical moment of liberal, enlightenment thought with the artistic representations of power structures by a largely unsuccessful artist at the moment he emerged into relative fame with a comparative literary approach to textual analysis.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi was born in Venice in 1720 to a family of craftsman, stonecutters, and architects. Forty-one years later, his copperplate etchings and engravings depicting photorealistic views of both ancient and modern Italy would circulate the continent. His etchings would influence authors such as Horace Walpole, Thomas De Quincey, and Victor Hugo. George Dance would design the dungeons at Newgate prison after being inspired by Piranesi's *Carceri d'invenzioni*. Today, the International Piranesi Award is given biennially for architectural accomplishment in central Europe. Piranesi's influence includes contemporary architects, art historians, and literary scholars. His work continues to be the subject of interdisciplinary scholarship and historical analysis. With his mastery of copperplate etching and exploration into classical Roman architectural spaces, Piranesi anticipated what would become the Neoclassicist movement. However, Piranesi's contemporary influence is not limited to literary and architectural impression but continues to inspire questions concerning the philosophical undergirding of the artistic movement.

Piranesi's work is divided into several volumes and diverse subject matters. The *Carceri d'invenzione*, *Imaginary Prisons* in English, are simultaneously artistically fascinating and historically terrifying for their content. This essay will examine and analyze three of Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons*: "Man on the Rack," "Prisoners on a Projected Platform," and "The Drawbridge." There are three key themes that emerge when reviewing the etchings: 1) the transformation of pain and punishment as exterior spectacle, 2) the imprisoned as a reflective tool for the viewer, and 3) the emergence of heightened terror as a transformative tool. As this essay is concerned with a temporal and geographical moment in the development of the artistic imagination of pain, confinement, and political power, I found in the course of my research that historically and critically contextualizing passages from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*

were helpful as secondary and supportive documentation reflecting this same phenomenon, particularly during the Constituent Assembly's penal reforms in France. Through "The Man on the Rack," "Prisoners on a Projected Platform," and "The Drawbridge," Piranesi anticipated the advent of omniscient surveillance and democratic punishment with its internalization.

Little is known about Piranesi's early life, though he was born to a family of craftsman in Venice and was heavily influenced by his uncle, an architect. After his failure as an architectural draftsman in Venice, Piranesi left for Rome to continue his studies in 1740. There, he worked alongside Giuseppe Vasi and developed his skill producing *vedute*. In 1742, after two years of working alongside Vasi, Piranesi supposedly contracted malaria, prompting a "fit of delirium" and what he considered to be the source of inspiration and content from which he drafted the *Carceri* (Yourcenar 104). He etched the first fourteen plates on copper shortly after at twenty-two years old as noted by his own inscription. In 1744, the twenty-four-year-old artist returned for a stay in Venice to study under Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, a well-regarded painter known for his "theatrical architecture." However, it is known that the first edition of the *Carceri* were printed on Roman paper, suggesting that Piranesi returned and first printed the plates in Rome where they were published in 1750 (Robinson 25, 39-30, 37).

The *Carceri* are divided into two editions with multiple issues of each. Between the two editions, Piranesi made multiple aesthetic and compositional changes. The first, containing fourteen plates, was printed and self-published between 1749 and 1750 and titled *Invenzioni capric di carceri*. In 1761, Piranesi published the second edition of the *Carceri*, changing the title to *Carceri d'invenzione* and adding two new plates (II and V). Shortly after, in 1764, Piranesi was commissioned to rebuild and redecorate the church of Santa Maria Aventina, employing ancient architectural elements for which he had grown popular (Yourcenar 92).

It is important to note that Piranesi failed to secure patronage and financial support during the time of the *Prisons*'s first edition's production. The influences of social pressures and constraints cannot be overestimated when considering the young artist's choice of aesthetics and content. His *Carceri* were not only unpopular until the 1760s but undesired. While the prisons are celebrated as his most imaginative and creative work today, during his lifetime they were "mildly appreciated and not at all understood, and consequentially seldom purchased" (Yourcenar 106).

Piranesi's *Carceri* are above all concerned with the construction of vast, experimental architectures. The aesthetics are a combination of classical Roman architecture, with contemporary notions of space and light. As Marguerite Yourcenar writes, "it is to the Baroque that Piranesi, in his views owes these sudden breakdowns of equilibrium, this very deliberate readjustment of perspective, this analysis of mass which is for its period a conquest as considerate as the Impressionists' analysis of light later on" (97). If the *vedute* produced reflect the prominent artistic techniques, then the content and choice of narrative structure within the copperplates are all the more influenced by contemporaneous philosophical theories. To separate Piranesi from the, a space not gently hewn with decisive theoretical conflict would be to amputate much of the view that Piranesi's work offers: it is not only space but idea.

In the preface to his analysis of the diminution of divine imagery in the west during the nineteenth century, J. Hillis Miller provides a rationale for exactly this kind of synthesis of cultural representation and aesthetic choice. "Literature is a form of consciousness... though literature is made up of words, these words embody states of mind and make them available to others," writes Miller in the preface. "If literature is a form of consciousness the task of the critic is to identify himself with the subjectivity expressed in the words, to relive that life from the

inside, and to constitute it anew in his criticism” (VII). Giovanni Battista Piranesi, the artist, would not have desired to be viewed distinctly from his work, as critics today may be too eager to cross the distance of nearly three hundred years. The first thought is perhaps the personality of the artist, a master separated from the realities of everyday suffering. Rather, Piranesi was familiar with the particulars of experience, with physical limitations, and with a near maddening dedication to his work. He was a man described by his son as “of passionate feelings, intoxicated by work, careless of his health and his comfort, disdainful of the malaria of the Roman campagna, sustaining himself on nothing but cold rice during his long sojourns” (Yourcenar 93). Yet, his etchings of the Roman countryside, artifacts, and imaginary views were, for the eighteenth-century buyer, symbols of wealth and possibility: social capital and “the equivalent of the coffee-table albums of artistic photographs offered nowadays to the tourist eager to confirm or complement his memories, or to the sedentary reader who dreams of faraway places” (95).

Yet, Piranesi’s *Carceri* exist in a mythological space, reserved for imagined and physically impossibles. Not unlike the impossible architecture of Olympus or of the Underworld, the *Carceri* imagine spaces that simultaneously avoid and incapacitate reason in contrast with Enlightenment aesthetics. They not only avoid comprehension with impossible arches, abounding contradictions in the distribution of load, and absurdity of the human staffage, they exude what Miller calls “the Piranesi effect,” a motif that he associates with not only the *Carceri*, but their aesthetic operation in relation to the political moment.

What Miller identifies in *The Disappearance of God* as “the Piranesi effect” is the tessellating horror of the prisons, that “even a pleasant dream, when ‘multiplied into ten thousand repetitions,’ becomes something before which we stand ‘loathing and fascinated’” (67). Miller associates this with the infinite space that De Quincey’s mind occupies once it becomes

self-reflective on his condition in the world where “time and space stretch endlessly in any direction, and where God has withdrawn himself to an infinite distance” (71). While Miller touches upon a crucial element to understanding Piranesi’s aesthetic of madness and irreconcilable dimensions, he incompletely ascribes this artistic moment as a consequence of the modern understanding of mankind’s condition in relation to divinity.

Piranesi’s *Carceri*, while produced during the Enlightenment, are not a product of the relation of mankind to divinity. The moral and philosophical distancing of mankind’s relation to God was already well established by the second edition of the *Carceri*. Besides papal patronage, Piranesi’s passion was devoted to classical figures and mythology. Rather than mourn the image of divinity in Piranesi’s canon, we ought to accept Piranesi’s *Carceri* as exactly that: the interpretations of ancient possibility interpreting the modern condition. It is not spiritual, but physical: the vast spaces and immense structures mark an artistic interpretation of the body’s condition in Piranesi’s moment.

The prisons were produced at a time historically characterized by “the relaxation of penalty in the eighteenth century... [where] crimes seemed to lose their violence, while punishments, reciprocally, lost some of their intensity, but at the cost of greater intervention” (Foucault 75). Similarly, in his comparative historical analysis on torture in the West, Christopher Einhoff proposes John Langbein’s theory that “torture was abolished during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries because the standards of legal proof were relaxed to allow convictions without eyewitness testimony or confessions” (109). Surely, etched only three decades before the landmark French penal reforms of the Constituent Assembly and the abolition of the death penalty by Emperor Joseph II, Piranesi’s work would have been marked by this same momentum away from corporeal punishment. However, given the mythos of Christian virtue and punishment



and its persistence in the canonical treatment of criminals, why is Piranesi's "The Man on the Rack" absent of the redemptive suffering prolifically disseminated in the Western European mythos?

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault notes a crucial transformation that must occur to stabilize bodily relations in a post-monarchical state: that the public spectacle of torture—widely defined as corporeal violence by authority—is replaced by signifying values that dissuade the would-be criminal from crime (104). While the *Carceri* are not subject to this direction, they operate within the cultural period and literary exchange, circulating in what Miller describes as an organism that "creates the environment as much as it is created by it" (VIII). Piranesi's "The Man on the Rack" contains a desperate contradiction in both composition and content relating to pain and ceremonial justice. Unlike many of the other *Carceri*, plate II specifically enlarges several figures to emphasize their importance in the narrative of the foreground. From left to right, the viewer sees, enlarged, the man at the wheel, the man on the rack, and the man standing above, holding what appears to be a dagger. Distinctly smaller, each other *personage* is small, expressionless, or positioned to emphasize their emotion via the posture of their bodies. They point, gesture, and gape, but act not on the subject. This posturing serves to exhibit the internal relationship of the collective group rather than the individual consideration. Regard the tranquility upon the faces of both the rack operator and the man holding the dagger. Here, Piranesi captures three grave historical artifacts: 1) reflection on classical methods of penal order, 2) the presence and importance of the mob, and 3) the geography of the public spectacle.

“The Man on the Rack” embodies the classical mode of penal operation, charged with the physical domination of the body. It is a manifestation of state-sponsored terror in the form of pain. Einhoff’s analysis of torture suggests,

While the deficiencies of the historical record make it impossible to generate numerical estimates of the prevalence of torture, enough evidence exists, in the form of general historical accounts and case studies, to detect trends and draw some general conclusion. Torture was legal, morally accepted, and commonplace in most ancient, medieval, and early modern societies. (104)

Piranesi’s neoclassical choices of metaphor and association, specifically with the use of seven well-documented traitors to the Empire, further suggest a utility to the public spectacle. Visible in the foreground of the scene are the busts and reliefs of various traitors. Piranesi depicts what is likely the punishment of a traitor or rebel by the sovereign:

The Roman Republic and early Empire prohibited torture against citizens, except in the case of treason, but this changed in the late Roman Empire, as the number of Roman citizens grew and the category of citizens became divided into two classes. *Honestiores*, or first-class citizens, could not be tortured except in cases of treason, but *humiliores*, or second-class citizens, could be tortured in criminal cases, if the crime was serious and some evidence already existed to indicate guilt. (107)

Judicial thought contemporaneous to Piranesi was that,

An offence, quite apart from the damage it may produce, apart even from the rule that it breaks, offends the rectitude of those who abide by the law... the crime attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign; it attacks him physically, since the force of the law is the force of the prince. (Foucault 47)

It is clear that what occurs in this plate is exactly the operation of sovereign reparation, where the sovereign's assigned actors execute justice. However, Piranesi diverges with his exaggeration of the image of the condemned to equal size of the punishers. Rather than depict the criminal as minutiae with which the sovereign may rightfully and completely obliterate at will, Piranesi represents this figure as what Foucault describes as "the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king" (29). What is at stake here is not the man's punishment and the brutality of it, nor the condition of the spectators; it is the role of power in proportion between the condemned and the torturer that is meaningful. In contrast to the other *Carceri*, "The Man on the Rack" contains dualistic support of the classical mode of penalty with the presence of the mob—notably absent in the other prison etchings as a force of power—and the open-air setting. This setting, where the validity of the torture is confirmed by its accessibility, signifies a confirmation of the methods used. However, it is clear that the mob, only vaguely defined by its members' outlines—and in the case of the figures to the upper right of the etching, their loosely human, animalistic expressions are more apparent than their bodies—is absolutely *not* the *cause* of this spectacle. Instead the *cause*, sovereign in Foucault's algebra, is identified with the condemned's equals, the torturers.

In "Prisoners on a Projected Platform," it is exactly the inverse of public spectacle that gives the scene and punishment their fortitude. Rather than vaulting arches bounded by cloudy sky, the tessellation of interior architecture close around the viewer. In fact, the viewer's position is entirely unknown, only presumably substantiated by a walkway or structure. In the background, minute, indistinguishable figures abide in timeless contemplation. Notably, the plate differs from "The Man on the Rack" in the positioning of the prisoners and their ability to see. Rather than being able to gaze around at their accusers and spectators as the tortured in "The

Man on the Rack” is able to, the defined texture of the skin and the contorted postures suggest restraint and a complete lack of mobility. This lack of mobility accompanies the subsequent restraint of the etching’s viewer and the spectators of the torture. The walkway just above the hanging counterweight terminates prematurely into a wall similar to the walkway towards the right, just above the eyeline of the viewer. The actual projection to which the prisoners are restrained seems to have been constructed and used solely for this purpose, without any of the railing or fencing that protects the other walkways.

These features suggest a unidirectional gaze of the spectator—in this case a unified subject including both the figures and the etching’s viewer—upon the prisoners. Of course, this gaze is not returned, as the prisoners’ gaze down into the supposed abyss. Here Piranesi plays upon the assumption of the viewer. Considering one’s initial reaction and assuming that the prisoners are suspended above an abyss reveals the desire to punish, to fulfill the terror that is incomplete within the etching, desired by both the figures and the viewer. Einolf describes the function of torture as that to “destroy victim’s sense of self, voice, and reality” (105). It is the tension felt before monstrosity and this possibility that the etching’s viewer must contend with. By the literal suspension of the prisoner’s bodies, Piranesi symbolically captures the fragility by which they are restrained. It is no mistake that there is no tension applied to cords that ought to suspend the counterweight despite its floating in the air as if held. “By assuming the form of a natural sequence, punishment does not appear as the arbitrary effect of a human power” writes Foucault (105). It is by creating spaces in which the very architecture suggests a prescriptive treatment that Piranesi captures the power of the emerging democratic state.

To derive the offence from the punishment is the best means of proportioning punishment to crime. If this is the triumph of justice, it is also the triumph of liberty, for then penalties

no longer proceed from the will of the legislator, but from the nature of things; one no longer sees man committing violence on man... In analogical punishment, the power that punishes is hidden. (105)

Foucault's premises in chapter 2, "The Gentle way in Punishment," begins with (1) "[punishments] must be as unarbitrary as possible" (104). However, it would seem that it is exactly this arbitrariness which draws attention and causes confusion to both architectural exaggeration and narrative in-cohesivity. These give Piranesi's prisons their fortitude and ability to disturb in subtle distortions. Considering the absence of the sovereign, of an equivalently exaggerated deity, or symbolic agent, the viewer and critic are forced to consider the implications of this absence. As Aldous Huxley writes about the prisons: quoted by Roncato in his essay:

One is made to feel that the genius of great artists and the labor of innumerable slaves have gone into the construction of these monuments, every detail of which is completely without purpose... The raw material of Piranesi's designs consists of architectural forms; but, because the Prisons are images of confusion, because their essence is pointlessness, the combination of architectural forms never adds up to an architectural utility or even possibility, and limited only by the necessity of evoking the general idea of a building.

(Roncato 7)

What is missing, then, is not a lack of structural symmetry, for this exists within the unidirectional gaze that is created. Just as the viewer is gazing at the etching, witnessing the unease of the prison's world, the spectators watch the execution of this immense justice. This final gaze is directed towards "the pit." What might be represented by the spectator's lack of awareness at the absence of the entire agent of order, justice, and the subsequent symbols that are generated can be explored in relation to the operation of justice within this scene?

It is no longer the terrifying restoration of sovereignty that will sustain the ceremony of punishment, but the reactivation of the code, the collective reinforcements of the link between the idea of crime and the idea of punishment. In penalty, rather than seeing the presence of the sovereign, one will read the laws themselves (Foucault 110).

What motivates and terrifies in this scene is the absent sovereign, signifying the decentralization of power. While the spectators stand and watch the torture, they are simultaneously conspirator in its assignment. Their bodies are only loosely etched in swirling patterns of single lines, barely circular, further depicting this composition of elusive substantive authority. Might the decentralization of authority, but the identification of punishment motivates such an aesthetic choice?

Punishment and torture in Piranesi's contemporary would not have associated incarceration with the function of entrapment that is common to 21<sup>st</sup> century judicial function. Rather, the 18<sup>th</sup> century prison functioned to facilitate reform and reaffirmation of societal values. This included moral instruction and religious teaching, specifically for beggars and public nuisances (Foucault 120-121). While the judicial reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggest incarceration as a viable alternative following the American revolution, corporeal punishment—that of labor, specifically—was understood to substantiate an exchange of well-being, of reform, and of progression back to a reasonable livelihood, including interpersonal peace.

What is evident in these choices is a representation of the relationship between symbolic ritual and effective punishment. Where the punishment in “The Man on the Rack” consisted primarily of the public spectacle, the construction of the prison in “Prisoners on a Projecting Platform” exists independent of the spectacle of punishment. The punishment, while a natural

progression of the architecture, is not the *source* of this setting. What is suggested here is the emergence of a specialized, devoted mechanism for dealing with criminals, their bodies, and primarily, perverse thoughts and criminal ideas. Rather than execute, the projection is intended to terrify. In Foucault's language, "the 'mind' as a surface of inscription for power, with semiology as its tool; the submission of bodies through the control of ideas" serves to confer comprehension of the power structure, rather than capital punishment alone (102). Where the torture of the prisoner by the absent authority is not merely an extension of the idea of the sovereign, but an extension of the consciousness and ego, generally. "A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas" (102). Piranesi imagines such a place, where it is the idea that is punished, where fear is used as a weapon in the mind rather than pain inflicted. It is no mistake that Piranesi's figures are suspended in forced wakefulness above the abyss, for this is the condition of the Enlightenment person, not only in conception of the sovereign but of themselves as subject.

If Miller's estimation of De Quincey's aesthetic use of "the Piranesi effect" is to be understood, perhaps it is not in the rhetorical sense but in the didactic. De Quincey writes, "I believe that all minds which have contemplated such objects as deeply as I have done, must, for their own protection from utter despondency, have early encouraged and cherished some tranquilizing belief as to the future balances and the hieroglyphic meanings of human sufferings" (23). The wandering mind of De Quincey meditating upon the seemingly pointless sufferings of mankind lends itself to the same radical subjectivity of suffering to which Piranesi draws attention. The progression proposed by the cultural, Christian dogma of seemingly pointless, barbaric crucifixion being universally redemptive, is replaced by pointless, unknown, and fundamentally questionable suffering.

Between the two editions of “The Drawbridge,” this maturation in the imagination of the mechanism of the prison transforms from mere coherence between pain and crime to punishment as such. Piranesi creates a depth of shadow and impossible architecture: the support for the walkway that stands without holding anything, the winding staircase in the upper right that curves behind a tower without apparent destination, and, most obviously, the pillar lying in the middle of the central walkway below the drawbridge. What had previously been possible architectural imaginations in the first edition (ca. 1750) were transformed into impossible perversions of space in the 1761 version. The architectural changes signify more than artistic preference, for in this impossibility is encoded the determination of choice, construction, and radical artistic force applied to the viewer’s expectations.

In “The Pit and the Pendulum,” Poe explores this same transformation of the punishment and the impression which it has upon the imaginative mind.

There came thronging upon my recollection a thousand vague rumors of the horrors of Toledo. Of the dungeons there had been strange things narrated—fables I had always deemed them—but yet strange, and too ghastly to repeat, save in a whisper. Was I left to perish of starvation in this subterranean world of darkness; or what fate, perhaps even more fearful awaited me? (Poe 308)

Following this consideration of the terror that awaits him, the prisoner explores the surroundings with his hand, finding “trivial difficulties,” “excessive fatigue,” and an enclosure of unknown shape. The prisoner’s near fall into the pit prompts reflection on the stories and imaginative myths of the Inquisition’s prisons:

The death just avoided, was of that very character which I had regarded as fabulous and frivolous in the tales respecting the Inquisition. To the victims of its tyranny, there was



the choice of death with its direst physical agonies, or death with its most hideous moral horrors. I had been reserved for the latter. (Poe 309)

The prisoner's eventual realization about the characteristics of the prison and the conditions of his confinement offer no solution to this process of identification of punishment with the narrativization of power, nor to the imagination of the potential for punishment. This is the principle of heightened terror, where the possibility for the torture experienced is the object of deference, the source of aversion.

Piranesi's prisons imagine the possibility of an architectural design whose very design promotes a fear and terror, not due to the instruments of torture and pain on display, but in the usage and accommodation of space, texture, and impossibility. It is the mental, imagined existence of the prisons that disturbs and unnerves the viewer and the occupants rather than their function; it is not the presence of "the projection" or "the drawbridge" that is horrific, it is the ease with which these spaces lend themselves to the use of power to punish.

To further demonstrate and elaborate on the presence of this philosophy of punishment encoded within the *Carceri*, I would like to look towards a modern instance of literary engagement with many of the same spatial and epistemological limitations. In "The Library of Babel," Jorge Luis Borges imagines a space that is epistemologically and geometrically complete. Arranged of adjoined hexagons, the story's setting is a structure described as spherical and existing infinitely in all dimensions. "Through this section passes the spiral staircase, which plunges down into the abyss and rises up to the heights" (79). It is home to the librarians and infinite repetitions of information with slight variations across space. The populace of the library—which is first called "the universe"—travel vast distances in search of hidden, lost information among the varying shelves. Borges experiments with the special imagination of the

Latin American prose. The text opens up, flourishing outwards in uncharted potential, simultaneously offering unimaginable reward and oblivion. The narrator's gaze, directed towards the paper on which he writes, hastily quantifies the unimaginable with the abstract symbols they have been given, the same "orthographic symbols" that the books within the library use. The narrator writes the dimensions of the bookshelves, the number of lines per book, and number of characters per line. Yet, at the same time repeats "the classic dictum: *The Library is a sphere whose consummate center is any hexagon, and whose circumference is inaccessible*" (80). The act of rationalizing the irrational reveals its dizzying proportions and the insignificance of the effort. Following,

Everything is here: the minute history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels, the faithful catalogue of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, a demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on this gospel, the veridical account of your death, a version of each book in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books. (83)

Writing two centuries after Piranesi's first edition *Carceri* were published, Borges imagines a space that is filled not with punishment or its instruments, but with knowledge infinite and boundless. He imagines the possibility of a society with such access in their hands, a society whose ethic is not of bodily manipulation but epistemological. Rather than present even a hopeful aspiration towards resolution of this problem of magnitude, of the treatment of the single individual in the face of the whole, Borges offers no hope.

If it is the case that the technologies present in the *Carceri* are not the source of the terror, but the ease with which the spaces lend themselves to punishment, then Piranesi has imagistically represented the change in the distribution of social and political power bound to

occur only a few years later and largely anticipated future aesthetic principles. With the bloody revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and the reformation of the doctrines of punishment only decades away, Piranesi's prisons may preemptively capture the relationship of power exhibited by the democratic forces: that of idealized fear, penalty, and punishment, and a transformation of the power to punish from the sovereign to a series of symbolic representations: representations that adjust themselves, that seem to be encoded in spatial dimensions themselves. Piranesi's prisons incorporate both classical and contemporary philosophy of punishment. They include scenes of collective spectatorship, participation, and general inclusion in the act. At times, they encode the function of Bentham's panopticon, where "any member of society will have the right to come and see with his own eyes" how the internal workings of the societal machine operate (Foucault 207). Piranesi's prisons, however, are not only buildings, home and detention for criminals, but entire worlds cascading upon themselves. They function to remind both the participant, the imprisoned, and the viewer of the reflections of power and punishment in society. Their architecture terrifies with the question of their origin and what enormous mass could have created such a place. Like the panopticon, Piranesi's prisons are "democratically controlled, since [they] will be constantly accessible 'to the great tribunal committee of the world'" (207). However, more horrible and terrifying than this, as Miller writes of mankind, is the realization that "[dreams] only make it possible for him to experience the true nature of his situation. He is an infinitesimal speck of consciousness an infinite distance from its own inner depths" (71). This is the great terror of the *Carceri*, created in architecture and design: that the participation of all creates the internal presentation of constant power and, perhaps, of punishment.

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