Habeas corpora

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The body has long been tasked with the symbolic work of making Northern Ireland, and its putative political excesses, representable. Most famously, Seamus Heaney turned to P.V. Glob’s *The Bog People* as the means by which to register and frame an understanding of political conflict in the North. Glob’s book detailed a series of archaeological finds in Scandinavia in which the bodies of the victims of ancient sacrificial rites were exhumed, having been preserved for centuries in peat bogs. Notably, Heaney discovers in these archaeological specimens not merely parallel deaths with which to compare contemporary violence but, more resonantly for him, confirmation of recurrent historical patterns of violence and human behaviour:

> Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for that whose cause is Kathleen Ni Houlihan, this is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern. And the unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles.

Within this blending of body images across history, heavily influenced by the psychology of Carl Jung in its archetypal mythos, the male body in Heaney’s poetry tends to receive symbolic repair. In poems such as ‘Funeral Rites’, ‘Bog Queen’, ‘The Grauballe Man’ and ‘The Tollund Man’, Heaney’s male body asserts a communal, fraternal identity that endures and transcends the violence by which it is mediated and produced in the first place. This restorative, imaginary integrity of the male body realigns with its guiding subjectivity.

By contrast, female bodies, in poems such as ‘Punishment’, remain the broken site of the visitation of violence and instead receive their higher
symbolic meaning and place by becoming the imaginative ciphers through which a male community establishes its tribal boundaries. The male bodies in this poetry are aesthetically recovered from their corporeal fracture, while it is precisely the bodily disintegration of the female figure that provides the constitutive ground for tribal and national integrity founded by their propriety over women. History and its antagonisms become representable in the mythic suture by which identity, in highly gendered ways, establishes a continuity through and over time. The bodily mediation of identity and community, here expressed by its constitutive violence, also becomes the remedy for that violence in the Peace Process and its Two Traditions model for understanding the North in which already established, warring factions find ways to live together. This cultural model for tolerant co-existence sought to weave together strands of Irishness and Britishness or Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as more hybrid or composite threads like Ulster–Scots identities or non-established dissenting Protestantisms. This cultural interlaving offered itself as a template for the state-led Peace Process in which the UK, Irish and US governments sought to instantiate the consociational model for conflict resolution. As such, the very same sectarian divisions deemed to be responsible for the conflict also became, under the management of liberal scrutiny, modes of new, more hospitable, living. Rather than being opposed to sectarianism, the liberal democratic order in fact relies upon this prior ordering of bodies in tribal communities. In other words, the representative status of the body for the liberal democratic state – literally and figuratively embodied in habeas corpus – has already set limits on which kinds of bodies and relations between bodies are possible under its auspices.

Cultural representations of Northern Ireland have always had to encounter the contradictions of representative democracy in the North: its norm of emergency legislation, its suspension of habeas corpus in internment, its use of Diplock courts and its periods of Direct Rule. But if liberal humanism is found to delimit the potential of alternative arrangements of bodies (that is as alternative forms of politics and collectivity) by reiterating the sectarianism to which it is nominally the progressive redress, then comparable strategies of attenuation can be discerned in the modes of thinking that are avowedly designed to resist the strictures of liberal democracy and the neo-liberal state: namely, the strands of post-structuralist and postmodern thought that eventually inform biopolitics. One of the first and most engaging efforts to rethink the politics of the body during the Troubles is offered by Allen Feldman’s Formations of Violence (1991). At one level this work is just as mythic as Heaney’s archetypal patterns, seeking as it does to address the ritualized ways in which sectarianism – including the sectarianism of the Northern Irish state – polices the body and social space and violently
deforms or expunges any otherness that threatens the self-identity of those tribal demarcations. Feldman’s book is also notable, however, for the ways in which it affords active, supplementary excess to those identarian processes, especially with reference to the anti-state insurgency of political prisoners and their use of their own bodies as sites of resistance. Feldman lucidly examines the recasting and reinscription of the male body in Irish Republican prison protests at Long Kesh, wherein it becomes porous, open-ended and effusive rather than ordered, closed and normatively transparent. However, such activity, in Feldman’s terms, always acquires its full symbolic meaning in a ‘ritualized circuit’ of identification that culminates in the ‘purifying sacrificial death and political sacralization’ of the Hunger Strikes of 1981. Here the overabundant corporality that might have led to new, insurgent ways of living turns out merely to be yet another instalment of the Symbolic Order, in this case the immemorial rites of death cults and regeneration myths. Thus, despite the search for alternative subjectivities and bodily constellations in *Formations of Violence*, insurgent anti-state practices still become individual acts of provisional rebellion that can only become collectivized in ways that align with already established sectarian identities and politics. There is no other destination for the individuated body – aside from its own carceral marginality – in the realm of collective politics other than in a tribalized, ritualized and sectarian community.

The purpose of this article is to challenge the version of Northern Ireland produced by both liberal humanism and the modes of post-structuralist and postmodern thought that seemingly oppose the former. I will do so by paying specific reference to how each discourse harbours a secret affinity with the other, one that congregates around the disavowal of the collective politics of class. In both the logic of identity and the logic of difference class is displaced. My own touchstone for reconsidering the body is provided by Walter Benjamin’s model of *anthropological materialism*.8 To Benjamin, the body is never solely the property of the individual, nor is it ever abstracted from history and society. The body is never simply and organically at one with itself or an agreed community. Benjamin’s version of the body was criticized by Theodor Adorno for pandering to a paradoxically idealised materialism as the compensation for the alienation and dehumanization of modernity: ‘It is as if for you the human body represents the measure of all concreteness’.9 Despite Adorno’s charge of ‘an undialectical ontology of the body’, Benjamin’s model is rigorously dialectical in its commitment to gauging how the body is shaped by and shapes social space.10 For Benjamin, the body transforms society and society transforms the body. Benjamin deems these processes ‘collective bodily innervation’, the reorientation of body and image space by which revolutionary affiliation, affinity and action is undertaken to transform the givens of a
situation: ‘all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge’. As Susan Buck-Morss discerns: ‘innervation is Benjamin’s term for a mimetic reception of the external world, one that is empowering, in contrast to a defensive mimetic adaptation that protects at the price of paralyzing the organism, robbing it of its capacity of imagination, and therefore of active response’. In other words, there is an active reshaping of the collective as body and the body as part of a collective; the body is therefore not the passive receptacle of either its own readymade biological integrity or dominating social forces.

Benjamin distinguishes between der Leib, the lived body, and der Körper, the physiological body. He also highlights the interplay between Leibraum, or body-space, and Bildraum, or image space and uses the technologies of cinema and the aesthetics of surrealism as his models for how we learn new collective means of re-orientating our social embodiment. In these dialectical relations, the dislocations of modernity that threaten the supposed integrity of the individual body make possible the imagining of new combinations and formations that transform the world and our collective place in it. Given his assessment that we inhabit the ‘empty, homogeneous time’ that disguises itself as progress but which is a perpetual state of emergency in which domination excludes alternatives to itself, Benjamin’s collective bodily innervation is a necessary means not only of dialectically embracing the alienating technologies of modernity, but also of recovering and reworking lost hopes and collective practices. As David McNally discerns:

What has been repressed and forgotten always leaves traces of itself; there is always something to be remembered. And that remembrance – the remembrance of the body, of crushed hopes, of corpses and failed uprisings, of dreams and the ancient meanings of words – is an indispensable part of the project of liberation.

Benjamin’s collective innervation is the means by which this article will contest the organic homogeneity of the body with its tribal source in the sectarian interpretation of politics in Northern Ireland, the management of that sectarian model by the capitalist imperatives of liberal democracy, and the postmodern heterogeneity that promises new alignments while fostering a difference as relativized as the fractious global space it would critique.

In terms of the interweaving of sectarianism and liberalism, Maurice Harron’s public sculpture Reconciliation / Hands Across the Divide, which was installed in Carlisle Square by the Craigavon Bridge in Derry in 1991, symbolizes the Two Traditions model for understanding the Troubles in its arrangement of two classically-formed, bronze figures facing one another
upon a base structured by a Celtic double spiral. The outstretched arms of the figures do not yet meet. Of course, most hopefully, Reconciliation can be viewed as anticipatory, as a staging of the confrontation between two warring tribes in which art itself transforms apparent stasis into a work-in-progress, allowing us tentatively to imagine the clinching handshake, the reconciliation to which politics will finally align during the Peace Process. If anything, however, Reconciliation serves to symbolize everything that is wrong and delimiting in the Two Traditions model which separates people in order that its version of culture might someday, impossibly, bring them back together. It imposes stasis on potential political movement alternative to the Two Traditions model. The avowedly natural and replete gathering of communities in the classical body of these statues also presages the more statutory institutional arrangements of the Peace Process and devolved governance in the North. For any legislation to be passed in the Northern Ireland Assembly, a majority is required from members who must identify themselves as either Nationalist or Unionist. Despite its seeming inclusivity and pluralism, the Two Traditions approach reinstates tribal community and actually excludes a vast range of sociopolitical agents and concerns from political and public space.

The representation embodied in Reconciliation and enacted in the institutions of the state provides a kind of habeas corpora – ‘you shall have the bodies’ – so that a regime of who may appear and be taken into account, what might be registered and felt and expressed, what forms and stakes are permissible, establishes aesthetic and legal limits on politics and political community. Here habeas corpus ad subjiciendum – ‘you shall have the body for the purpose of subjecting him/her to (examination)’ – proceeds from an artwork whose reconciliation is not projective but retrospective; it is less a hopeful anticipation of a future understanding and more an anterior alignment with prevailing consensus. It is art not as dissent but as censorship. It forms already given political subjects – ad subjiciendum – in modes of subjection and subjectivation that exclude the representation of other, alternative arrangements of bodies, experiences and actions. Liberal pluralism and the state are already transparently represented in Reconciliation in that they already frame and shape the terms of the sculpture. Liberal pluralism is not the deferred future of the impossible handshake but, precisely, the act of constructing these two communitarian bodies in this form. It already makes politics reconcile with both this sectarian ordering of bodies and its own self-evidenced progressive ethos. The gap between the yearning hands is already a spatial representation of the absent presence of a neutral, beneficent version of the state that will conjoin the unreconciled. Liberal democracy cannot of course find representational space for those non-identical to the Two Traditions. And if liberal good will
already frame consensus by prescribing what it will reconcile, then neo-liberal economics – under the signs of progress, regeneration, global investment, the City of Culture project – is representable in Reconciliation by offering Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ as the mediator between the two communities; the god-like propensity of the global market that Smith asserted achieves cohesive social good out of self-interest, his monetarist paradise in which greedy or selfish intentions dissolve.\textsuperscript{18}

The classical unity of Reconciliation’s bodies transfers an Imaginary corporeal and subjective wholeness onto the Symbolic realm of sectarian community. In this guise, an apparently progressive political and economic dispensation instantiates itself as the mediator to an already agreed situation. This mediator was itself made flesh when Bono held aloft the hands of David Trimble and John Hume on 19 May 1998 at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast during a concert advocating a ‘Yes’ vote in the Good Friday referendum. Bono later reflected: ‘people tell me that rock concert and that staged photographed pushed the people into ratifying the peace agreement. I’d like to think that’s true’.\textsuperscript{19} Celebrity megalomania aside, liberal democracy and the realm of commodity have already founded the consensual carapace of organic identity into which people are pushed, and in whose statutes they are ratified and made representable. The tribal distribution of forms censors Benjamin’s collective bodily innervation and our capacity to reimagine forms of solidarity and belonging. The identification of tribes with antecedent forms of classification sets the limits on imagination and agency and, tautologically, reaffirms the status, propriety and benign neutrality of the representational frame censoring the North of Ireland.

Liberal pluralism and the neo-liberal economic rendering of democracy seek to occlude more revolutionary transformations by partitioning, beyond representation, the non–identical or heterogeneous overflow of bodies out-with the demarcations of identity. Pierre Bourdieu terms neo-liberalism ‘a programme of the methodical destruction of collectives’ and this economic drive finds its false conscience in the liberal pluralism that feigns to include its diversity of citizens into a consensus already constituted by the exclusion of radical difference.\textsuperscript{20} If the state permits frames of representation that gather its citizens into homogenous identification with those frames – so that collective bodily innervation and a contesting of this distribution of the sensible are \textit{a priori} expurgated from those modes – then the postmodern dispensation of difference would seem to facilitate an antagonistic decentering and disordering of those givens. However, postmodernism harbours a collusive short-circuiting of collective innervation that complements the liberal humanism to which it is nominally opposed.\textsuperscript{21} For all that regimes of representation are apparently placed under duress by the differing strands of
postmodernity, from the more thoroughly post-structuralist to the biopolitical, there is also an underlying antipathy to modes of collective innervation that are just as delimiting as the institutional representation of democracy and which establish laws regulating the distribution of the sensible.

To speak of a law of the postmodern would seem to contravene its guiding though diffuse energies. Most canonically, Jean-François Lyotard proposed a sceptical dispersal of *les grands récits*, or the overarching metanarratives of Enlightenment reason, into *les petits récits*, the micronarratives of the localized, provisional and contingent. The ‘crisis of metanarratives’ is, for postmodernism’s celebrants, the collapse of the repressively totalizing and universalizing structure of not only Enlightenment ideals of truth, rationality and progress, but also the teleological faith of Marxism and Communism nominally opposed to the dominant strands of modernity. In both cases, to Lyotard’s mind, the mutable heterogeneity of the postmodern short-circuits the systems of domination which have legitimized themselves either in the name of rationality and progress, or indeed justice, equality, emancipation and knowledge. In this sense, truth’s only residual verity is the fact of its complicity in power. As Lyotard argues: ‘if a metanarrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge, questions are raised concerning the validity of the institutions governing the social bond: these must be legitimated as well. Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth’. In response, Lyotard defines the ‘postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives’. This incredulity ultimately pervades all narrative in Lyotard’s model, since even the micronarratives – or *petits récits* that he often locally lauds – are supplanted in the development of his thought by the Event, that is by moments and modes of singularity which are unnamable, antipathetic or resistant to any narrative ordering at all. History and society are couched as non-totalizable and heterogeneous forces. Comparably, the postmodern subject and its body are individuated as nodal networks in which a variety of social practices intersect in ways that cannot be rendered into fixed, determinate or total meanings. Instead they reside in restive, mutating and asymmetrical dynamics.

A provisional rather than replete version of the self – in which the self divests itself of an integrated identity in both its production by and strategic response to power – is found also in Michel Foucault’s post-structuralism and its account of the body as the site of discursive inscription and simultaneous refusal to grant those productive discourses full sovereignty or complete coherence:

We cannot know the truth about ourselves, because there is no truth to know, simply a series of practices that make up the self. Nor can we escape the regulatory institutions and discourses in which we are
produced. But we can identify them (or at least some of them) and identify our own practices of the self, and from this basis of knowledge, formulate tactics by which we can live in the world.\textsuperscript{23}

As with Lyotard’s crisis of metanarratives, truth here is produced by the mutually sustaining and circuitous relations of power and knowledge. However, according to the Foucault model, such discursive inscriptions never attain the absolute regulation that they promise, while, in turn, our provisional strategies of response also remain loci of an irreducible heterogeneity. The body is never the sum of, but always the difference between, competing practices and inscriptions. In both Lyotard’s and Foucault’s models capacious openness thwarts ideological closure. The affirmative take on these propositions is lucidly distilled in Linda Hutcheon’s advocacy of the postmodern as constitutively \textit{ex-centric}, as an efferent decentering in which the ‘local, the regional, the non-totalizing’ disorientate cores and margins and assert ‘difference, not homogeneous identity’.\textsuperscript{24} Likewise, Brian McHale interprets postmodernism as an unmoored \textit{heterarchy} that sunders hierarchy: ‘A heterarchy is a multi-level structure in which there is no single “highest level” . . . it is impossible to determine who is the author of whom, or, to put it slightly differently, which narrative level is hierarchically superior, which subordinate’.\textsuperscript{25} In the Foucaultian trajectory – which garners a more thoroughly post-structuralist antipathy to the subject as such – a biopolitics of the body, rather than a heterogeneous difference of embodied subjectivities, considers itself a mode of resistance to the open, horizontal circuitry of biopower. This is power that is \textit{productive} rather than \textit{repressive}; power that makes us live; power that is no longer the absolute sovereignty of fixed and authoritarian sources: ‘it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body’.\textsuperscript{26}

If such positions were to be accepted at face value, then the underlying irony of such micronarrative and biopolitical flows is that they have become \textit{le grand récit}. If postmodernism is itself a grand narrative, then a more circumspect account of its contradictions and antinomies is necessary to understand its own resolution of ‘the crisis of meta-narratives’ as something other than just ironical \textit{volte-face}. There is a recodified \textit{habeas corpus} – a producing of the body in apparently new and composite ways – in the sedimentations of events and singularities constituting the law of the postmodern which has become pervasive even in its very heterogeneity. The ceding of the ground to the law of the postmodern, so that it becomes \textit{le grand récit} (disabling alternative modes of expression or agency) can be demonstrated in avowedly rebarbative appraisals of the present, such as Fredric Jameson’s account of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism.\textsuperscript{27} Yet, while Jameson’s acceptance of postmodernism’s pervasiveness would problematically and
passively confirm its status as *le grand récit* – it is the condition of our times, not only the object of but also the template for our diagnosis – what most markedly and productively distinguishes his method for demarcating political limits and possibilities from, say, the Lyotardian or Foucaultian approach is the direction of his cognitive mapping toward *totality*.

For the post-1968 French intellectual tradition *totality* had tended to become synonymous with *totalitarian* through an antipathy to the French Communist Party and communism or Marxism *per se*. Part of Lyotard’s move beyond narrative and its supposedly attendant closure was a shift to the openings cut through representation by the sublime singularity of the Event in ways that indicate the turn to Heidegger in French circles at times when he was untouchable in Germany. Lyotard therefore pitches the postmodern artist or writer as being

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\text{in the position of a philosopher: the text he [sic] writes, the work he [sic] produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an event; hence, they always come too late for their author, or, what, amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (*mise en œuvre*) always being too soon.}^{28}
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Lyotard’s Event therefore offers itself as a rupture in representation and the framing of form, a deep difference irreducible to consensus. The political purpose of this proposition avows a testimonial affinity with those on the receiving end of history and its supposed rational and agreed forms; its anti-representational aesthetic specifically declares war on totality *qua* totalitarianism. As Lyotard writes: ‘Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name’.\(^{29}\)

For all that Lyotard and Foucault might render Marxism’s method as totalitarianism by naming it a systemic logic that eliminates difference in the name of some higher synthesis and transcendent absolute of logic, it is the Sublime in its postmodern and post-structuralist forms that most adheres to the transcendence of the infinite, which is now called the singularity of the Event. In this case, the presentation of the unrepresentable (nominally in the name of the unrepresented, those excluded or remaindered by totalitarian systems and logics) offers Heideggerean disclosures of Being, clearings and openings of the horizon of meaning in historical continuity. In revolutionary guise the Event is not simply a point in which things change; it is a
rupture in the frame and structure of how we understand or gauge change and confer meaning. If capitalism is a system that perpetually changes in order that things stay the same (in other words, that capitalism continues to exist) and the main challenge to that dominance (Marxism) supposedly turned out to be another form of domination, then the Event is offered as a singularity that transforms what is meant by change, a heterogeneous shift that is non-identical to the logic of the world and hence a means of difference. In Alain Badiou’s thought, *contingency* is the name for this disruptive agency, while in the biopolitics of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the body rather than the subject provides the resistance to biopower because its assertion as the site of internal, heterogeneous difference is enacted upon aggregations of singularity and commonality, rather than unity and identity: ‘The figures that coalesce in the multitude – industrial workers, immaterial workers, agricultural workers, the unemployed, migrants and so forth – are biopolitical figures that represent distinct forms of life in concrete places, and we have to grasp the material specificity and spatial distribution of each’.30

Whether the Event is the trauma by which the Philosopher-King offers therapeutic interpretation in deciphering the space of those who cannot express themselves and are written out of history, or the Event is a revolutionary rupture embodying a contingency that is always provisional and fluid, the postmodern Sublime must misread dialectics as totalitarian so that its own singularity attains sovereignty over dissent and difference. For Lyotard, the aesthetic particularity of the anti-representational Sublime critiques the power of ‘capital’ and of ‘party’, both capitalism and communism, by harnessing an incommensurability untrammelled by the totalizing historical logics of each. However, Lyotard cannot quite explain how there is distance or critically incommensurate space between postmodern pluralism and the crass consumer eclecticism that he feigns to indict: ‘one listens to reggae, watches a western, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and “retro” clothes in Hong Kong’. The only means by which this particular set of supposedly non-totalizable experiences – framed in affirmative rather than negative terms in Lyotard’s argument – might tally with critique is via some notionally higher level of understanding layered by the philosopher himself, an avant-garde awareness self-reflecting upon ‘the power of money’ above the zero degree of common experience.31 Lyotard’s postmodern difference, which is actually perfectly representable by, and in, the capitalism he claims to oppose, must assume a privileged synthesis of knowledge. A transcendental absolute is to be found in the singularity and contingency of the Event, a logic and law that has less to do with disputing dominant frames of representation and much more with veiling the underlying complicity and identity of such heterogeneous openings with global capitalism.
With these critiques in mind, Northern Ireland becomes an impacted crucible in which the contradictions of representative democracy – the norm of emergency legislation and the suspension of *habeas corpus* – test the limits of both liberalism and postmodernism. What is most telling about both liberal humanism and post-structuralist and postmodern critical models is that each converge in disabling the total method of dialectical materialism and collective innervation. In the case of liberal pluralism, collective politics is named as The Troubles or sectarianism and experienced as the site of trauma and mourning by the liberal subject and the pluralistic therapy of its politics; in the case of the postmodern, a professed anti-statist radicalism that sublates collective politics to the law of the non-totalizable singularity and event. Both in fact seek to make the North representable – in the first case, to the codes of liberal democracy and the Peace Process that supposedly redeem modes of communal identification that were only ever sectarian even as liberal democracy enacts that selfsame sectarianism institutionally. Hence it becomes possible to turn the Twelfth of July into Orangefest and to rename avowed supremacy as inclusion. In the postmodern turn, the North is made paradoxically representable in its unrepresentability, in its conformity to a postmodern Sublime of non-representation in which collectives were never collectives to begin with but were already assemblages of difference across non-totalizable singularities – singularities whose full meanings are provisionally nominated by analysts who decipher the yielding silences of traumatized victims and the recondite entreaties of restive ghosts. Hence the rise of trauma theory, in which people’s experience of history contains meanings that escape them but which are decoded by the therapist-critic.32

Those seeking to find a non-totalizable surplus in the circuitry of a biopolitics in which power is also always resistance, tend to turn to the events and attendant cultural representations such as Bloody Sunday or the aforementioned Hunger Strikes. Where liberalism finds an excess in such events that notionally reaffirms its own sovereignty over normality and good measure, the post-structuralist strands of biopolitical models are precisely seeking a surplus that resists full determination and which cannot be accounted for by dialectical materialism (in which history has a form). In such cases, dialectical materialism becomes a sign of dynamics of difference and repetition in the Deleuzian model of Hardt and Negri that insists on a multitude of productive singularities. Where liberal humanism seeks to normalize the state in Northern Ireland – for which a terrorist excess is responsible for the forestalling of that promise – the post-structuralist and postmodern biopoliticians instead wish to confront the norm that is the state’s violence, its perpetual ‘state of exception’ in Giorgio Agamben’s term, that would rationalize its constitutive domination.33 The resistance, such
biopolitical models urge, persists as an excess to that state norm, on the one hand, and, on the other, to dialectical materialism and Marxism given that these are rendered as totalizing and repressive narratives and forms that disallow the flows and assemblages of productive multiplicities and singularities. It is tempting to view a film like Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* (2008) as simply the dark mirror image of liberal humanism; rather than seeking to normalize Northern Ireland in accordance with a wider, benign representational democracy, it normalizes it by placing the conflict in a wider world now couched as itself messed up in pathological ways. The film moves from the streets (and a possible encounter with mass politics and collective innervation) to a journey into the embattled self who moves beyond language and others into a final vision of his younger self – a younger self that was already the prophecy of his future resolve. As David Lloyd has argued, while McQueen’s film draws important distinctions between the shared, overcrowded cell spaces of the first prison protests – in which new kinds of bodily organization and communality were made possible in direct abeyance of the carceral regime – the film itself does become a bit like ‘the loneliness of the long-distance hunger striker’.34

In this sense, the film’s shift from its clamorous opening on the streets – which is rendered in terms of the same sonic and visual repetition that typifies the whole film’s aesthetic – to the hallucinatory delirium of the dying hunger striker, encases the delimitation of collective experience into individuated reverie. The fictionalized version of Bobby Sands suspends the internationalist affiliations of Sands’ writings that connect his own struggle not only with the movement for Irish freedom but also with struggles across the world. Sands’ prison writings make evident his will to make the protests resonate beyond the walls of the prison in ways the film only fleetingly covers via a compressed opening shot of bin lid-banging – a narrow shot that, in turn, attenuates the full context of this form of street protest. Visualised in this way, Sands’ belief that ‘everyone, Republican or otherwise, has his [sic] own particular part to play’ appears to signify as little more than a cycle of noise as noise and action as action.35

The only real voice Sands is given in the film is the prolonged set-piece discussion with the priest, a scene with only two long shots that was so obsessively rehearsed by Michael Fassbender and Liam Cunningham that it appears less a live discussion and more two overlapping monologues already knowing what the self and the other has to say. Indeed, that fatalistic repetition typifies the whole film’s ethos in which everyone knows what is going to happen next: prison wardens go through their morning routines of breakfast and then checking under their cars; their wives know to make breakfast dutifully and apprehensively watch by the window; the prison officer brings
flowers to his mother in the care home because that is what is expected; and
his killer shoots him because that is his task. The plot or action, as such, is
intensified sonically and visually by motifs such as the clattering of bin lids,
the sweep-up of urine in corridors, the drumming of riot shields, or the spi-
rals of excrement artfully smeared on the cell walls. Even though Hunger
appears to do something very different to the stock filmic representation of
the Troubles – undertaken typically in the form of the thriller – it actually
shares with works like Harry’s Game (1982) or Patriot Games (1990) an
underlying sense of already determined outcomes in which the actors act
only in accordance with pre-ordained roles and positions. As such, Hunger
becomes, as with other collaborations between McQueen and Fassbender
like Shame (2011), a performative visualization of obsession which, in this
case, uses the Troubles as the stage for pathological repetition.

Of course the Deleuzian strand of biopolitics would view repetition as
transgression, as a movement and difference that is outwith the frame of
dialectical materialism. In Hunger the body seems to offer itself to post-
structuralist interpretations of Irish Republicanism that strive to afford it
some non-statist, recalcitrant space by which to preserve its radicalism. This
account of republicanism against the state finds via Lyotard or Deleuze or
Badiou moments of singularity, event, non-representation which are not co-
opted by narrative and the ordering of power. The spectacle of Sands’ body
in Hunger tends to be interpreted in such terms. However, in such models
the gesture to radicalism actually accords with another imperative: namely,
the law of the postmodern. Therein, it is the micro-political, the non-
totalizable event or body, which serves to sever connective solidarity. Hence,
Sands’ politics become transcribed, or sublated in the Hegelian sense, by
obsessive circles of repetition and difference which are not visualizations of
the instrumental regime of state power (and a surplus of flows and resistan-
ces thereto) but are, instead, reductions of a clear set of internationalist politics
to existential and solipsistic trauma. McQueen’s film finds not politics but
Geworfenheit ins Dasein – the thrownness into Being of today’s
Heideggereans – that serves as a further strategy of depoliticizing contain-
ment. Therein the unsayable collectivity of politics makes way for the
pathologically and wilfully individualized body that cannot be narrativized
or explained by politics, history or context. As such, Hunger normalizes the
North of Ireland to the law of the postmodern wherein there is avowedly no
collective means by which we may conceive of the world or change it: we
must inexorably accept that we are non-totalizable and non-narratable
nodes disembodied from our obligations to revolution or transformation.
The anxiety that the conflict in the North might have involved collective political struggle is assuaged by finding that, all along, it was a montage of
existential angsts inflected most forcefully by an enduring masculinity. The body of Sands carries the symbolic freight of the law of the postmodern in which the singularity of the subject of the event – even, in this case, in the endurance of its despairing disposition – confirms the sovereignty of the micro-political and non-totalizable individual.

In what is a very brilliant reading of Steven McQueen’s *Hunger*, Zach Horton makes the case that *Hunger* is more than just a journey into solipsism. Instead McQueen’s version of Sands disseminates as a Body without Organs in a film which decentres narrative expectations and conventions so as to provide molecular decompositions and becomings. To Horton, rather than tracing a monadic subject moving us away from collective politics and collective innervation, *Hunger*’s visual and formal radicalism actually opens up connective multiplicities that rework the temporal structure of the film and recast the meaning of its opening:

Only the final dissolution of the body of Fassbender-Bobby-inmates-viewers-prison-Ireland-Britain-flock-God-camera imbues the enigmatic opening of the film, with its chaotic aural roar and multitudinous anonymous bodies, with provisional meaning . . . this lid-banging scene is not the beginning of the film but its end, the product of the film-as-process, its production of itself, the individual become multiplicity through the construction of a body without organs, the ultimate work of the hunger artist become molecular, the tracing of a continuously variable contour, of a revolutionary collective to come.36

In this interpretation, in order to assert the multiple becomings and collectivity, the film’s opening becomes its end. It might be that the start of *Hunger* is, in fact, the end of another film, this time in an attenuated snapshot. That other film is Gillo Pontecorvo’s *La Battaglia di Algeri* (1966), which ends with the repetitive calling of a woman taking part in the protests of the crowded streets. Pontecorvo’s film itself combines the more habitual narrative means by which a political struggle is visualized and plotted – namely, in the form of a core group of key characters or protagonists – with breath-taking stylistic experimentation that takes us out of individualized lenses into a more collective embodiment of history and the politics of the streets as the film sweeps above and out of the Casbah and dissolves the more individualized points of view into the mesmeric movements of the masses. In ways that inform the seeming paradox of *Bloody Sunday*’s stylized documentary aesthetic, *La Battaglia di Algeri* generically invokes, melds and mutually complicates strands of Italian neorealism and documentary realism, as well as Eisensteinian dialectical montage and Third Cinema. Even the apparently grainy newsreel authenticity of Pontecorvo’s film was achieved through the anti-naturalistic use of screens blocking out the sun,
while the film continually, and self-consciously, foregrounds its own gaze. The film is consistently aware of the contested situatedness of its multiple lenses and heterogeneous modes of representation and it always acknowledges the relations of its aesthetics and styles to relations of power that complicate the former. Even its final efforts at visualizing the collective innervation of the masses involved small groups of extras conforming their movements to lines of chalk drawn on the ground by Pontecorvo. Nonetheless, La Battaglia di Algeri simultaneously refuses the Imaginary and then Symbolic function of individualized bodies and characters to mirror agreed political positions – most frequently the pseudo-reportage of the views of Colonel Mathieu on the French side and Ben M’Hidi on the Algerian – through the unfurling of history into the urban crowds who, in turn, necessitate the pushing back of the camera into the soaring space by which an effusion of activity and meaning is traced beyond the framing of character response or guidance.

At the very same time, however, Pontecorvo’s film cannot quite allow this collective innervation to presage its own new vision and possibility beyond established identifications. The final moments are preceded by a halt in the visual narrative and the insertion of a static frame of text, which informs ‘July 2, 1962: The Algerian Nation is Born’, and the crowd scenes are then focalized by the figure of an anonymous woman dancing with the Algerian flag. Here the textual prompt beckons the movement in the crowd back into the norms of official, state history mediated by a wailing woman, who then attains symbolic meaning as the repository of her nation. As such, the possibilities of new affiliations of collective innervation are recoded and representationally contained by the gender-inflected display of the body of the mother-nation. It is possible, in line with Christine Buci-Glucksmann’s conceptualization of *baroque reason* or a *reason of the Other*, to approach the ecstatic song of the anonymous woman as an excess beyond both colonial rationality and the normative postcolonial *telos* of the reconciled nation in its independence rather than hackneyed symbolic embodiment. Nonetheless, the film at least opens up its own technique to a visually stunning expression of collective innervation even as it then codes those in gendered ways. It might then be – with regard to Zach Horton’s reading of *Hunger* – that it is vital that McQueen dissolves precisely those gendered codes through the Body without Organs. But *Hunger* moves even further away from collective innervation than *La Battaglia di Algeri*. *Hunger* departs from its opening street scene, and its noise, so that these just become one of the many things that the dying Sands escapes. The film has almost an inverted *Bildungsroman* structure in which the adult Sands finds his becoming in the individuated, secret self of his own resolve and forbearance as a cross-country runner.
If *Hunger* eludes the unfolding of collective innervation in *La Battaglia di Algeri*, then that is equally true in a film that is more directly influenced by it at visual and technical level: Paul Greengrass’ *Bloody Sunday* (2002). Although he describes *Bloody Sunday* as ‘homage’ to Pontecorvo’s film, Greengrass also states how he sought to rework it:

*Battle of Algiers* was made before the conflict in Northern Ireland emerged; it’s a film made in a different time about different wars. Today’s world is a world riven with conflicts, many of which are essentially about different traditions trying to inhabit the same piece of land and that’s true of Northern Ireland, it’s certainly true of the Middle East and it’s true of Kosovo, it’s certainly true of parts of what was formerly the Soviet Union, it’s certainly true of Kashmir. So here you have all these tremendous conflicts, these are our conflicts, the conflicts of our time, and the problem in making a film – that is a homage to *Battle of Algiers* – is that the politics don’t work. That was very clear to us both at the time because, if you have two traditions, two groups of people inhabiting the same land, laying claim to it as you do in Northern Ireland, you can’t just say well it’s easy, let the colonial oppressor go home: how can you do that? Protestant people have been living in Ireland for three hundred years. ... And that is why the Civil Rights movement that grew in Derry in the late 1960s is so importantly politically. . . . Out of this conflicted city of tangled history and violence emerged this political movement of tremendous optimism and tremendous tenacity. It’s an idea that has not gone away. It’s grown and you can see it operating in different parts of the world, this idea that “how do you reconcile conflicts between groups of people who inhabit the same land”? You can only do it on the basis of developing shared rights, not contested nationalisms; that is why the Peace Process in Northern Ireland is such an inspiration, that is why every single person that played a role in that – whether it’s the Irish government, the British government, the US government, all the leaders – to the conflict inside Northern Ireland, each of them have been able, together, to get beyond.38

In his own way, then, Greengrass also retreats from the street politics of Pontecorvo’s film, even in his praise for governments and leaders managing the conflict and peace in Northern Ireland. There is no space for a collective redress; it is states, governments and leaders that resolve tribal conflicts between warring tribes. As with the fictional version of Sands in *Hunger*, in *Bloody Sunday* the focalizing presence of Ivan Cooper is moved beyond language. The nominally opposed positions of Greengrass’ liberalism and post-structuralism both collude in displacing politics into trauma. The body becomes, respectively by turns, the site of liberal mourning or the object of non-narrative spectacle. In the first case, the bodies of *Bloody Sunday* come
to symbolize the trauma of politics which renders liberalism lost for words. Ivan Cooper’s character leaves centre stage at the film’s close with nothing left to say and, in this sense, a depoliticizing liberalism returns to frame the whole film – a film which draws heavily from Pontecorvo’s Battaglia di Algeri at the level of style in its account of Derry’s streets but which postpones its collective politics into apparently individualized impotence. In fact, the unsaid truth of Bloody Sunday is that collective politics are trauma, so that the brutally silenced bodies come to bespeak and nominate some future day where individuals are not disappointed and liberal good will become the norm and the law.

A post-structuralist account of Bloody Sunday, which invokes Deleuze, Badiou and Lyotard but then overlaps with the disappointed liberal humanist subject, is offered by Tom Herron and John Lynch. Herron and Lynch appreciate Greengrass’ Bloody Sunday because it does not offer the narrative cohesion of Jimmy McGovern’s Sunday (2002), a film which begins with contextual detail about the inequities of the Northern Irish state and which then seeks to trace core characters in the build up to, and aftermath of, the killings. Herron and Lynch find that Bloody Sunday ‘tends far more to articulating the open nature of the event than McGovern’s rather more closed narrative structure’. Their understanding of the killings is informed by the non-narrative post-structuralism that insists on the excess of the scene of the event, its irreducibility to frames of understanding, representation or the tropes of historicity:

The trauma of the event is driven by its irruptive nature, which, whilst needing to be inserted into any number of narratives, such as personal, historical or political, ultimately resists any final closure. As the event manifests itself through the range of discursive and dramatic repetitions, it still oscillates between the illegibility of the trauma of the real and an increasing level of narrativization. The spectrality of the event is the return of that which was not able to be said. Yet the inscription is what allows for any sense of the event occurring at all.

However, this model tends to elide versions of the event as revolutionary rupture (a surplus or excess of resistance and energy) and the Event as unspeakable trauma. As such, the state violence was designedly unspeakable for the state (hence the cover-up) but the non-narrative advocacy of repetition, difference, singularity and non-totalizable perspectives actually assists that cover-up and the notion that this was all a dreadful mistake. If Greengrass’ liberalism praises the Civil Rights movement at the very same moment that it reduces mass protest to a tribal impasse that required the peaceable intervention of governments, Herron and Lynch’s post-structuralism also sublates
the clear, internationalist politics of Civil Rights to a restive set of partial signs and signals that are never able to express themselves directly but which must await the decipherment of philosopher-analysts years later. Either way, collective innervation and the politics of the streets are not lived, direct expressions of the multitude in its becoming and supplementary excess – as is promised by the Deleuzian and Hardt and Negri models – but a muted, incoherent reaction to a traumatic scene for which someone else must decode the open-ending meanings and possibilities. If the liberal humanist sidelining of Ivan Cooper in the film would not be out of place in a Glenn Patterson or David Park novel – mass events taking a traumatic turn – then the post-structuralist and biopolitical interpretation comparably puts distance between thought or action – and people’s capacity to think and act on their own terms – and the meanings of thoughts and actions, which are made the object of someone else’s inquiry and analysis. Democracy becomes not a surplus of multiplicities but a trauma that requires expert adjudication. The narrative of liberal politics and the non-narrative event of the postmodern collide to thwart the core function of politics and its collective innervations, namely: the capacity to disagree, to think and act differently, to contest the framing of debate by a liberal construction of sectarianism and by the universal mediator of global capitalism. Such agency becomes lost amidst the lament of liberal humanism or the philosophies of the psychoanalysts sifting through the postponed and partial meanings of the muted hordes.

If biopolitics sought to indict a biopower that would seduce us with the delusion of our own agency while making us live in the terms of power, the possible resistances also produced by that power tend to enervate passively rather than collectively innervate. Bodies tire as they await their choreographers to arrange their meanings. And if the more psychoanalytical strands of today’s politics claim, as Hilary Neroni ably shows, that the unconscious is the point at which the subject’s agency exceeds the subject and dislodges its self-identity, then the Slavoj Žižek argument – that we have been dreaming the wrong dreams and need to find new ways to dream – is always ready to become simply the inversion of the trauma theory in which we have been living the wrong nightmares.41 In either case, the analyst is required to piece together the political meaning of the psychic excess that collectives produce but never understand. Benjamin’s collective bodily innervation anticipates a world in which we all know and realize the solidarity of our dreams for ourselves: ‘Just as a child learns to grasp by stretching out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so humanity, in its attempts at innervation, sets its sights as much on presently still utopian goals as on goals tangibly within reach’.42 When the moon is finally a balloon we will have overturned the meanings of our masters.
Notes and References

4 For a rigorous critique of the gender politics of these poems, see Patricia Coughlan, “‘Bog Queens’: The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney’ in Toni O’Brien Johnson and David Cairns (eds), Gender In Irish Writing (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1991), pp. 88–111.
5 For an affirmative version of how the Two Traditions model might teach people to live together and to transcend the sectarianism that this model actually affirms, see the work of the Cultural Traditions Group and indicative publications such as Mourna Crozier, (ed.), Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland: Varieties of Irishness (Belfast: QUB Institute of Irish Studies, 1989); Cultural Traditions in Northern Ireland: Varieties of Britishness (Belfast: QUB Institute of Irish Studies, 1990).
8 Proposed in the original German as ‘anthropologischer Materialismus’. V. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser (eds), Gesammelte Schriften (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972–89), p. 971.
10 Adorno to Benjamin, Complete Correspondence, p. 147.
13 Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften VI, pp. 80–81.
16 The work was commissioned and funded by the UK’s Department of the Environment and both pre-dates and presages the Peace Process proper. Installed in its location in 1991, the sculpture’s official unveiling in 1992 was notably twenty years after Bloody Sunday.
17 Not least in terms of women, as the repose of these statues re-invokes the perfected male victims in Heaney’s poetry and the fraternal integrity of the community ordered by their bodies.
31 Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 76.
32 For a robust and measured account of trauma theory that is attuned to both its potentials and limitations, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008).