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# Can You Starve a Body Without Organs? The Hunger Artists of Franz Kafka and Steve McQueen

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## Abstract

This essay examines the anti-producing human body in its limit case of public self-induced starvation, as figured in Franz Kafka's short story 'A Hunger Artist' and Steve McQueen's film *Hunger*. Both works represent the fasting body as hollowed out, a resistance to capitalist-spectator capture that spatialises itself as a smoothing, a relative reconfiguration of parts to whole through the evacuation of flows. In both works the human body becomes a local body without organs, paradoxically disarticulated from the more complex assemblages that constitute it while recording potential circuits of disturbance or resonance predicated upon the porousness of bodily boundaries.

**Keywords:** expressionism, body without organs, spectatorship, fasting, starvation

## I. Diagnosis

Steve McQueen's 2008 film *Hunger* opens in agitated tumult, an asignifying, multitudinous roar of sound, like metallic rain or the collapsing of a tall building. The visual register slowly resolves into an image: scores of human bodies banging what appear to be the lids of pots against the ground. An array of bodies, faces. This is, it seems at first, a chaos that contains the totality of narrative possibilities, the whole cloth from which the film will subsequently select a protagonist. Yet

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we never encounter these bodies again in any recognizable form. Nor will we be able to positively identify the precise location of this brief, elliptical scene. It maintains no representational continuity with what follows. This essay responds to the film's fissures, its dams and flues, with an experimental investigation of the bodily boundaries produced and perturbed by self-induced starvation. It will focus on the production of the human body—the body that produces—through the form of its limit-case, the body that fasts. Considered thus, the human body, traced as and reduced to a posited boundary, is a particularly telling site of desiring-production, a spatialised interplay of flows and partitions, the smooth and the striated. This paper will examine the fasting body in two works, two mediums: 'A Hunger Artist' by Franz Kafka and *Hunger* by Steve McQueen. In both cases it will raise the question of the individual body's relation to spectatorship and multiplicity. In considering fasting as anti-production, as the smoothing of a local body into a body without organs, it will figure Kafka's short story as a diagnosis of a BwO that fails to activate its virtual potentialities in a renewed process of striation to effect a political resonance through its constitutive audience. *Hunger* picks up where Kafka left off, presenting a tentative solution to the problem of individuated escape through a molecularisation of the subject within the medium of film itself. Ultimately, *Hunger* effects a perspectival shift that approaches the (virtual) collective from below, from the point of view of the subject become multiple, finally approximating the Hunger Artist's dream of satiation.

## II. Capture and Withdrawal

Perhaps surprisingly, Deleuze and Guattari have little to say about 'A Hunger Artist', this quintessential story of bodies and flows, in their book-length study of Kafka. They note only that 'Fasting is also a constant theme in Kafka's writings. His writings are a long history of fasts. The Hunger Artist surveyed by butchers, ends his career next to beasts who eat their meat raw, placing the visitors before an irritating alternative' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 20). They here figure fasting as an alternative, or perhaps more aptly a digestive impediment, to the most primal source of food, raw meat—the consumption of one assemblage by another. This follows a passage in which they figure writing itself in the same position: 'writing goes further in transforming words into things capable of competing with food' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 20). Is writing, then, a form of fasting, or fasting a form of writing?

'A Hunger Artist' presents fasting as an oscillation between spectacle and art. The text details the professional struggles of a freelance faster, self-described and publicly billed as an artist. In the course of the story his career status declines from world famous act to out-of-fashion novelty. Eventually he joins a circus as a sideshow and is promptly forgotten, left to die. His artwork is his body, which he deforms, reshapes, shrinks, desiccates. Nonetheless, he never exists as a fully autonomous body; much to his consternation, he is only an artist by virtue of his spectators, and he ardently wishes for their approval, for popular success as an entertainer. He produces his body only in relation to other bodies:

The artist now submitted completely; his head lolled on his breast as if it had landed there by chance; his body was hollowed out; his legs in a spasm of self-preservation clung close to each other at the knees, yet scraped on the ground as if it were not really solid ground, as if they were only trying to find solid ground; the whole weight of his body, a featherweight after all, relapsed onto one of the ladies, who . . . first stretched her neck as far as she could to keep her face at least free from contact with the artist. . . (Kafka 1976: 248)

Kafka details an extended series of bodily encounters: the Artist's body, reconfigured and hollowed out, his head against his breast, knee against knee, makes tentative contact with the ground, with the body of a female spectator, and later that of an attendant. Meanwhile, these molecular encounters modify the bodies around him: the woman with whom he comes into contact strains her neck like a Lamarkian giraffe<sup>1</sup> in order to decouple from him. Her plastic morphology mirrors the artist's; his own bodily reconfiguration seems to be a struggle against a resurgent, spasm-inducing force of self-preservation. His body, art object, struggles to maintain its form, its upright stature, the contour of its boundary line. It is this curious struggle that provides the audience with the spectacle it craves, but also participates in the redrawing of the Artist's bodily boundaries, forming a higher-order assemblage articulated to him through desiring-production even as its lower-order components seek to disconnect, to shore up his barriers, to squelch his spasmodic-ecstatic perturbation of the audience-machine. The hollowed body refuses food only to fuse with other bodies: a becoming-molar that is also a becoming-molecular. Paradoxically, the smoothing of the Artist's body re-articulates it through spectacle to the bodies of his observers in a reterritorialisation of desire that renders him simultaneously co-extensive with them and affectively traced in a reinforcement of the geometrical contours of the organism-body. His

40-day fasts (enforced by his impresario as the limit beyond which the public's stimulation 'by a steadily increasing pressure of advertisement' cannot be maintained) mark periods of productive withdrawal from nutritional flows only through an auratic nodal fixing within a network of monetary flows (Kafka 1976: 247). The body becomes smooth surface, its virtuality preserved and affirmed, at the moment that it is captured and immobilized by the forces of capital-spectacle.

This paradox, activated within the text as a line that has traversed a 'nomadic life' spent within a cage (Kafka 1976: 245), is precisely the paradox of boundaries tackled by Spinoza in his *Ethics*. For Spinoza, even though 'the whole of nature is one individual', provisional boundaries are *produced* through modal interactions (Spinoza 2005: 43). Spinoza's *conatus*, later reconfigured into Deleuze and Guattari's desire-as-plenitude, is a principle of production, the generation of idea and body at a site of interaction. Where boundaries are produced bodies are expressed, along with the 'joy of action'. For the Deleuze of *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, expression is primarily a model of perspective: Spinoza's true radicalism lies in the obliteration of the distinction between subject and object. '*Substance expresses itself to itself*' (Deleuze 1992: 185). The Artist's body in Kafka's story, considered as a site of Spinozan expression, is produced by the audience at the same time that it singularises itself precisely because these are two modes of the same substance. Considered from one perspective, the audience produces the Artist's body from itself, its larger assemblage, by delineating boundaries, by recording the striating effects of immanent forces. Considered from another perspective, the Artist (as assemblage rather than as subjective agent) produces his own body by smoothing it—that is, by disarticulating it from the continual flows (of energy, capital, attention) that capture it, recovering the potential for new configurations with the larger assemblage of which it is part. Thus his (re)constructed body, as 'organic representation' or art object, is both a deterritorialising joyous affect and a reterritorialising 'feeling presiding over striated space' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 499).

Kafka's Hunger Artist, as machinic assemblage, stops up his bodily orifices, cuts off all flows, becomes a grid of potential (but unactualised) circuits. In other words, a BwO. 'It is only by means of the body without organs (eyes closed tight, nostrils pinched shut, ears stopped up) that something is produced, counterproduced, something that diverts or frustrates the entire process of production, of which it is nonetheless still a part' (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 37–8). The BwO, then, is really Deleuze and Guattari's version of Spinoza's substance, affirming

difference—the complete set of differentiated modes—through primal unity. The human body, as site of production, is thus both a desiring-machine and a BwO, production and anti-production in constant tension.

The smooth space of the Artist's affect-body-without-organs is constantly recapitulated into the striated space of public performance, periodised in the form of imposed fast-breaking every 40 days. The Artist despises these breaks, and comes to abhor the re-articulation to other bodies that they produce. The re-activation/reactive-ation of his inputs produces a striated public space composed of vast chains of connective syntheses that he resists as BwO while seeking virtually as desiring-machine. This appears to be exactly the affective tension Mark Rothko has in mind when he declares that art 'lives by companionship, expanding and quickening in the eyes of the sensitive observer' yet similarly dies 'by the eyes of the vulgar and the cruelty of the impotent who would extend their affliction universally!' (Serota 1987: 83). The Hunger Artist, who produces (anti-produces) only himself, enters this bidirectional affective chain as a sort of recording device, tracing its lines on his own hollowed body. The artist's encounter with the artwork's constituting audience recalls Deleuze and Guattari's perspectival distinction between content and expression. Brian Massumi reminds us—articulating *A Thousand Plateaus'* discussion of expression with Deleuze's earlier reading of Nietzschean force—that in any encounter of forces, one envelops the other:

One side of the encounter has the value of a content, the other of an expression. But content and expression are distinguished only functionally, as the overpowered and the overpowering. Content is not the sign, and it is not a referent or signified. It is what the sign envelops, a whole world of forces. Content is formed substance considered as dominated force-field. (Massumi 1992: 12)

Content and expression are two perspectival sides of the same coin—tossed in every encounter. Spinozan *conatus*, already relativising the distinction between subject and object, spectator and artwork, is vectorised by Nietzschean force. When we observe or experience an encounter from the dominant position, the dominated appears as content, captured and manipulable, ordered by signification. The artwork, thus woven into the striated space of the gallery, stage or circus, has become molar and inert: the deadly combination Rothko dreads. But what of the inverse perspective, that of the dominated force? If the Hunger Artist is captured by spectatorship, does he not also perturb that

machine, test its boundaries and thereby expand his own? The potential to do so, figured early in the story as detailed above, dissolves as the text continues and negative affect mounts to a complete withdrawal, a desire to avoid all contact with other bodies even amidst the Artist's desire to be constituted in relation to them. Late in the story this ambivalence leads him to work for a circus, which Kafka figures as pure flow: 'A large circus with its enormous traffic in replacing and recruiting men, animals and apparatus can always find a use for people at any time, even for a hunger artist, provided of course that he does not ask too much' (Kafka 1976: 251). The flow of technical and organic machines that comprise the circus engulf the artist as constitutive component, incorporating him into its apparatus. As BwO, however, he resists the territorialising operations of these flows, rendering connections virtual by sealing off his body, which thereby registers, records these potential circuits as a totality. He becomes a barrier within this flow, 'only an impediment on the way to the menagerie' (Kafka 1976: 253). He disjunctively links to other machines through potential interruption, yet his desiccated body becomes merely a record of virtual connections never made. The Artist has lost his audience.

Why does he never activate these connections? Deleuze and Guattari remind us what is at stake here, on the taut surface of the BwO produced through fasting. The attraction and repulsion between the desiring-machine(s) and the BwO should give rise to a new structure, a 'celibate machine' that modifies them both, 'forming a new alliance between the desiring-machines and the body without organs so as to give birth to a *new humanity* or a glorious organism' (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 17, emphasis added). Because the Artist's *conatus* has been turned against itself, made reactive, this greater deterritorialisation remains closed to him, as does the 'eroticism of the machine liberated over unlimited forces' (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 18). At the end of the story, just before he dies, he explains that he needs to fast 'because I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else' (Kafka 1976: 255). On one hand, this is a simple failure of *conatus*, which Spinoza describes as an 'appetite' that 'is nothing else but the effort by which each thing strives to persevere in its being, each body in extension, each mind or each idea in thought (*conatus*)' (Spinoza 2005: 21). Whereas the celibate machine *produces* consumption, the Artist remains reactive, defensive, circumscribed by the flows of capital and consumption-machines. Ingesting nothing, he is himself consumed.

On the other hand, as Massumi reminds us, this is a question of perspective as much as affect. The dominated Artist sees himself only from the perspective of the audience that has ordered and objectified him. To activate the obverse perspective would mean to view the larger audience-circus-performance assemblage as an expression of its molecular components, of which his body is but one. It would be to register and trace the active perturbation of boundaries, the shock waves sent through that assemblage by his active manipulation of flows. Fasting would have to be more than the inability to take pleasure in food, a reactive resistance to the flows of spectator-capital. In becoming a BwO, he has effected a disarticulation from these flows, but only at the cost of a new and paralysing unity: he remains a singular, molar object, a world of forces contained in a sign. Even in the end, when he becomes a blockage instead of a focal point, a set of forces virtualised by his smoothing, truly blockading flows, he remains unified by the sign of Art. He fails to become molecular; the text falls short of recuperating him as such. As individual, as subject of and to negative affect, he can only be rendered as content, one character in his eponymous story, at the centre even as he shrinks to a point, left to die an objective death. From this perspective, he could only have rejected all flows, all food, in a textual closure, the local site of stalled *conatus*, the capping of the freeplay of signification that the text had previously kept open.<sup>2</sup>

### III. Striation, Flow, and the Cinematic Subject

This failure of desiring-production is further mapped in a more recent work by artist Steve McQueen, *Hunger*, which attempts to recover the revolutionary potential of fasting through molecularisation, picking up where Kafka's text left off. *Hunger* is ostensibly the story of IRA member Bobby Sands, who led a hunger strike while incarcerated at HM Prison Maze in Northern Ireland in 1981—in which Sands died. The film chronicles a series of events in the everyday routine of the prison, leading to Bobby's beating, his subsequent decision to lead a hunger strike, the slow decline of his health through starvation, and his eventual death. However, McQueen decentres the film's subject from the very beginning, opening *Hunger* with a different individual apparently in the role of the protagonist, a prison guard eating his breakfast. We follow his daily routine as well as that of a new inmate as the paths of both intersect amidst the flows and assemblages of the prison machine: guards' lockers serve to segment and block symbolically endowed objects from domestic life in a decoupling that emphasizes the possibilities of

productive synthesis: a wedding ring decoupled from a hand that will later begin to beat Sands – only to fail to connect in an instant, coupling instead with the concrete wall of the prison, which in turn deforms the hand's boundary by breaking the skin, releasing a flow of blood. The logic here – prison logic – is inexorable: the hand is soaked in a sink, the blood mixing with water in a repetitive act; each repetition slightly different from the last, the flesh less contained, a series only halted in a further act of deformation, a point-blank gunshot wound that empties his blood directly onto his catatonic mother, herself only one embroidered pink shape amidst the homogeneous, striated space of a pastel nursing home.

Flows of fluid – blood, water, urine, excrement – are traced throughout the film. Each runs into the others; the prison's H-block becomes the site of these transformations, this production. Circuits of flows are traced on the celluloidal surface, over the striated texture of the prison's topology: along its corridors, its series of parallel doors, its bars, slits and doorways. The site of maximum blockage and maximum flow, and thus the most generative site of production, of intensities, is the prison cell. The new inmate joins another in a cell smeared floor to ceiling with excrement. Food is delivered by the guards, consumed by the prisoners, transformed into shit, and made to encounter the structure of the prison itself, transfiguring it, in this case, into aesthetic object, a striking painting that is at once non-representational and aesthetic emergence through a celibate machine: the cell, deterritorialised from H-block's striated mosaic through the shit-smearing-smoothing of its surface, acts as the BwO upon which de-formed organic assemblages both mingle and stall, where production occurs precisely because it is halted.

Perhaps the most striking visual example of connective synthesis in the film occurs when the two prisoners use the undifferentiated mass of leftover food to mould a barrier around their cell door, a miniature wall formed by turning the flow of food against its source, segmenting and concretising it, giving shape to a basin that echoes that in which the prison guard soaks his bloodied fists. Into this makeshift structure they pour a pot brimming with urine, transferring this fluid from one vessel to another, but with a difference: this second basin makes use of another connector, the gap under the cell door, and the wall of food serves to direct the flow of urine out of the cell, into the connective passageway of the corridor, designed for the transfer of humans and here used as transitive site of convergence. As the urine seeps under the door, it traces a path into and down the corridor; the long-shot of the

corridor itself reveals that similar flows are pouring out of all of the cell doors; the camera holds as these slowly snake toward the centre of the hall and begin to meet, forming a new connective, a new aggregate flow. Though no prisoners can be seen or heard in this shot, a new machinic assemblage is formed from their aggregate connectors, recorded on the surface of the empty corridor, and at the same time forming a smooth, heterogeneous surface overlaying not only the diegetic corridor but the otherwise striated space of the still image, here born, dying, born as cinema.

The collective urine machine clears the way (intensity degree zero) for the emergence of a new subject, a new subjectivity, in the form of Bobby Sands himself. Bobby as an individual character is only featured in the central 40 minutes of the film, after a half hour of narrative flows. In the space of the film he is produced by these flows, liquid and social as well as imagistic and aural, represented and representational. The urine, faeces, rotting food, proliferation of doors and corridors gradually coalesce into a representation of the historical personage nominally at the centre of McQueen's film. The two prisoners hear the unscheduled approach of the guards and brace themselves for a violent encounter. They stand, tensed, facing the door of their cell. The film cuts to what should be a reverse shot of the door opening, but is instead Bobby yanked from *his* cell, typologically identical yet defined by a different set of coordinates. Then, in the lavatory, a return, a repetition: the prison guard's fist slammed into a wall, coupling of flesh and blood to water, intercut with the violent shearing of Bobby's hair. Blood, dirt, water, flesh and hair commingle, then eventually recede, out of the frame, to reveal a face. Thus the protagonist emerges as a focal point, a sort of golem constructed out of a social assemblage of political prisoners, filmed bodies, flows of blood, the sound of blows against flesh, excreted fragments of celluloid.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari slightly recast the BwO as *that which one can make oneself*. This is in contrast to *Anti-Oedipus*, which primarily figured the BwO as a substratum upon which things are built (through desiring-production, always in opposition to the BwO). In the later book, the BwO is a set of practices, a space made smooth through the vectors of its inhabitants, 'such as tribes in the desert' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 484), and thus intimately connected to subjectivity itself as its effect and the sum of its potential pathways: 'But you are already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic: desert traveller and nomad of the steppes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 150). The subject traverses the

circuits traced on, the lines that form, the BwO. It has no fixed identity, no fixed meaning. It is 'forever decentred, *defined* by the states through which it passes' (Deleuze and Guattari 2009: 20).

Without organs the body is opened to new pathways, new vectors; the subject is better able to realize its already nomadic nature, becomes more fluid, increases its power of action, increases its joy. The BwO here becomes a creative challenge, echoing Deleuze's Nietzschean rereading of Spinoza in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*: 'We speak of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effects, of the thousand ways of moving the body, of dominating the body and the passions – but *we do not even know what a body can do*' (Deleuze 2001: 18). In his second book on Spinoza, then, Deleuze re-negotiates the boundaries of bodies as the spatialised interplay of affect. Instead of the differentiation within unity explored in *Expression in Philosophy*, he mobilizes a characteristic of what he would later describe as smooth space, 'a space of affects, more than one of properties' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 479). The mathematically defined organism-body (described by ratios of relative movement) of striated space here becomes the continuously variable, vector-based nomadic subject of ametric space. While expressionism allowed for the co-production of body and mind, space and idea, through the tracing of parallel boundaries as in 'A Hunger Artist', here *conatus* is spatialised as a nomadic subject, continuously traversing the lines of its own multiplicity.

The temporally central segment of *Hunger* is concerned with Bobby's decision to lead a hunger strike. Here, after emerging as a differentiated subject out of the detritus of the film, he immediately turns that subjectivity against himself, against his organs. This is the only segment of the film which remotely resembles a typical filmic narrative, a character study. Here we witness banal scenes wherein he meets with his parents, who ask him if he is eating well. The prison guard is assassinated in the presence of his own mother. Each series comes to an end, the flows are arrested, the subject, now at the centre of the picture, buries them, smoothes them over. The section culminates in a 23-minute conversation (17 minutes of which unfold in a single, still, wide-shot) between Bobby and his friend, a priest. It contains the only sustained dialogue in the film, detailing Bobby's belief that he is nothing more than a political tool of the Irish Republican leadership, that his ineffectuality has been determined by them. Accordingly, to effect some change in the status quo, he will act unilaterally, refusing to eat until the British capitulate or his body dies. The priest is appalled, accuses him of devaluing life, becomes angry. But Bobby is resigned to his action, which

he sees as the inauguration of a series that will likely continue past his foreshortened lifespan, that won't be completed until substantial change is achieved. Seventy-five prisoners have volunteered to join the strike. Each one who dies will be replaced by another; thus one act becomes a connective synthesis, a linking of bodies in series, forming a larger assemblage. So ends the conversation, and Bobby's isolated, centred subjectivity. To make this series, thus far rendered only as intellectual possibility, actualisable, the molar subject labelled 'Bobby Sands' must dissolve.

The scene is immediately followed by the recapitulation of a shot we've seen before: the empty corridor, lined by facing cell doors, criss-crossed with pools of urine. A sanitation worker appears, wearing rubber boots and wielding a shop broom. Slowly, laboriously, he sweeps the urine, en mass, over the surface of the hall. The camera never moves, but he slowly approaches us, eventually propelling the co-mingled fluid directly under the lens, into the virtual space of the audience. The deterritorialised production of the prisoners as ad-hoc collective is thus reterritorialised into the cinematic apparatus, the viewer's gaze as directed by the camera itself. Just as we have constructed the golem of Bobby Sands, we will now be asked to dismantle him, to deconstruct our own spectatorship and enter into new configurations with the film itself.

The final 25 minutes of *Hunger* refigure the protagonist as hunger artist, positioning the audience uneasily between the roles of clinician and patient. A doctor, off-screen, booms a litany of symptoms, each involving the deformation of one or more organs,<sup>3</sup> to Bobby's parents; the patient is absent from the shot. Who in the audience here does not posit herself in that role, does not consider the status of her own organs at this moment of spectatorship? When the narrative's patient reappears he is no longer Bobby Sands. His body has become withered, desiccated. Every rib protrudes from his shrunken skin; we know that it is precisely the organs that are missing. Like Kafka's Hunger Artist, his body has become hollowed out. Curiously, however, as the body takes shape through its hollowing, the film loses any trace of docudrama, becomes documentary. The camera is here refigured as a medical instrument, surveying a body; the viewer assumes the role of clinician. The subject that has been revealed through the smoothing of the narrative-machine, the refocusing of the audience gaze from art spectacle to medical spectacle, is no longer Bobby Sands, historical personage and sutured protagonist. *The figure in the centre of the frame is now Michael Fassbender, the actor.*

#### IV. Becoming Multiple

Deleuze and Guattari are careful to allay our suspicions that dismembering the Self is really an act of suicide:

Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorialisations measured with the craft of a surveyor. Actually, dismantling the organism is no more difficult than dismantling the other two strata, signifiante and subjectification. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 160)

Are we relieved? Surely we can take Fassbender's body as a model of dismantling, of hollowing out, of smoothing. For we wonder, of course, how much it can take, and ask ourselves, *what are its limits?* The subject is dissolved, bifurcating into two actors (one ostensibly representing the younger Bobby). The body comes apart: blood is discharged from the rectum, vomit from the mouth. Traces of the body are left as mysterious emanations on the sheets that make contact with it. This disintegration, this molecular decomposition, is also a becoming: not only a becoming-molecular and becoming-other, but a becoming-multiple. As the desiccated Fassbender lies in bed, affectless, diffuse, the camera swoops above and around him aggressively as if in search of its subject. But the shot fades several times into a double exposure: a flock of birds in flight, the collective beating of their wings forming an aural collage, a smoothing of striated sound, a blending and a proliferation that accompanies the deformation of the singular image, the image of the fixed subject, now absent from the unitary body. The body of the hunger artist has become the multiplicity it always already was, a BwO and part of a larger body without organs, the film itself as smooth space. Here McQueen-Fassbender-Sands have managed what Kafka's Hunger Artist could not: the reactivation of desiring production in the absence of the monadic subject, the conversion of the body without organs into a connective multiplicity. Kafka renders the conditions for transformation, but does not fully realize, in 'A Hunger Artist', the project of becoming-other, of reterritorialising the body without organs. McQueen's film recuperates the hunger artist through a recovery of the multitude, the formation of new multiplicities. Signifiante, subjectification, organization. *Hunger* displaces the historical-singular signifier of Bobby Sands from the actor-signifier Michael Fassbender, itself decentred and diffused amidst celluloidal flows. Finally, the film

effects a perspectival shift; as the molecularised, multiple body of its decentred protagonist comes into view through its diffusion, it reverses the direction of forces that constitute it (the filmic apparatus itself, the striated space of spectatorship), creating a new conjunctive synthesis that potentially spreads this process of molecularisation to other beings: The equation is reversed, the social grid is itself altered, resonating to new frequencies set in motion by its lower-order singularities. *Hunger*'s true political dimension, then, lies not in its representation of resistance as narratological-historical trope, the expression of a counterforce against hegemonic domination from above (in this case Thatcher's incarceration machine), but rather the far more radical reconfiguration of the filmic apparatus to effect a perspectival shift, a revealing of the conditions of production themselves. The limit case of the starving body, as Kafka shows us, lies between subject and object, the productive synthesis of art and the capture of spectacle. The body that fasts becomes simultaneously disarticulated from its constituent flows and reformulated as discursive focal point of quasi-medical spectacle. But if the hollowing of the body is a kind of smoothing, indeed a smoothing-over of the striated Subject, it can also become a virtual operation: in Deleuze's re-reading of Spinozan *conatus* and in McQueen's film, the molar subject at the centre of the machinic apparatus of production is rendered smooth, as primary unity with its disarticulated flows, as prelude to another order of production, inscribed on this surface. Bare life blossoms into productive multitude; the lines traced on the BwO produce a virtual collective that potentially includes not only Kafka's fictional connoisseurs of professional fasting but the actual amateurs who watch McQueen's film and thereby construct and deconstruct Bobby Sands. Where Michael Fassbender's body comes into view a new set of intensities is born. A tone is struck, a resonant frequency synthesised in a state of becoming, a pregnant space waiting to be occupied by other bodies in the process of becoming multiple.

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. I would like to suggest that 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.

## Notes

1. Lamarck's theory of evolution, in which organisms morphologically adapt to their environment and then pass those traits on to future generations, is notably active and additive rather than passive and subtractive as in Darwin's theory of natural selection. Henri Bergson reformulates Larmarkism into *élan vital*, a tendency towards self-directed or creative change that is central to Deleuze's thought as the formula for the virtual and thus lays the ground for desiring production (see Bergson 1998: 76–97 and Deleuze 1988: 96–8).
2. See Derrida 1980: 292 on freeplay, and Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 53 on the proliferating series.
3. We may compare this to a similar scene in *David Blaine: Above the Below*, which documents magician and endurance artist David Blaine's enactment of Kafka's fictional role in the spectacle of 44 days of fasting while publicly displayed inside a transparent box suspended over the Thames in 2003. Beforehand, a doctor describes the hypothetical effects on Blaine's organs; after the spectacle, this striating gesture will be again reterritorialised in the form of an article in the medical journal *Nutrition* that curiously utilises its own data to establish the 'validity' of the fast, and thus of its own data. Here Blaine's body is smoothed only to be recapitulated as a striated graph of ketone bodies per urine volume (see Jackson et al. 2006: 893).

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