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Spectacular suffering: the imprisoned body as an artefact of resistance

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Abstract:	The spectacle of the body in pain has long functioned heuristically in crime and justice. Within this phenomenon sits a counter-cultural tradition of re-enacting outrages in public view to rally against injustices. This article starts from the established claim that bodily suffering comprises a core matter of humanitarian campaigning. However, if 'spectacular suffering' has predominantly been discussed as a visual experience, this article frames the phenomenon in terms of transgressive performance. This is exemplified by demonstrations of forced-feeding, hunger strikes, self-immolation and lip-sewing carried out by prisoners or by their intermediaries with a view to publicising their cause. During such exhibitions, the body in pain becomes a heuristic device for converting suffering into a medium for public consumption. However, tropes of corporal suffering are susceptible to cultural contestation and resistance from spectators. These possibilities call the publicity of suffering into question as an inherently progressive strategy.

Spectacular suffering: the imprisoned body as an artefact of resistance

Introduction

> 'Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story' (Scarry, 1987: 3)

The suffering bodies of the confined are familiar signifiers of resistance to penal oppression. There is by now an established scholarly literature on the radical subversiveness that is claimed to inhere with corporeal and self-destructive techniques in relation to prison struggles or protests. Tropes of sacrifice, suffering and weaponisation of the self are interwoven into accounts of prison mutinies, hunger strikes, dirty protests, suicide, immolation and mutilation as evidence of an undiminished will on the part of the confined to defy the prison's power to punish (Foucault, 1991; Feldman, 1991; Abdo, 2014; Campbell et al, 1994). Scholars assign the phenomenon of autalgic (self-induced) pain to a distinct order of signification where this type of suffering is thought to be semiotically fertile and therefore, politically meaningful (Ellman, 1993; Caldwell, 2012; Bargu, 2016). From an empirical perspective, because such events are rarely directly observed, but transmitted to the world in mediated forms, via mass media, academic scholarship, official inquiries and publicity campaigns for example, the meanings, forms and goals of mediating practices assume critical importance.

This article examines campaigns which publicise inhumane conditions in prisons in terms of material and cultural practices that utilise 'a corporeal language of pain' (Scarry, 1987) for partisan or conscientious ends. Whereas a great deal of scholarly commentary has illuminated the visual grammar of suffering, its interpretation and meanings, by reference to to graphical genres, the focus here is on performative and embodied forms of protest theatre (Ellman 1993; Cho, 2009; Van Leeuwen, 1995; Caldwell, 2012; Finburgh, 2017). The conception of performance as an embodied art form as well as disruptively critical force has common purchase across the visual and theatrical arts and prison scholarship (Sontag, 1983: 181-204; Butler, 1993; McLagan, 2002; Bargu, 2016). The argument takes as its point of departure Elaine Scarry's (1987) seminal treatise on suffering as a conduit for communicating political and moral censure. If, as Scarry (1987: 6) proposes, extreme pain annihilates the sufferer's voice, it becomes all the more necessary that their ordeals are given shape through 'those who are not themselves in pain but who speak on behalf of those who are'. Therefore, the discussion frames the dramatisation of bodily suffering in campaigning activism as a communicative strategy through which events in hidden custodial settings are conveyed to the public domain. Such performances are exemplified by commemorative parades by relatives of the detained, for example, and re-enactments of notorious instances of forced-feeding, torture, confinement or executions by artists, performers or activists. The public restaging of extreme acts of punishment are also intended to be didactic events, in the hope that they will lead spectators to political action. In this context, exhibitions of suffering are meant to be doubly transformative: firstly, the process of translating performance into spectacular events converts private suffering into matters of public consumption and political discourse, and secondly, they render the

suffering body into a heuristic medium through which public enlightenment can be achieved.

'Spectacular suffering' is the concept used by scholars of slavery (Mallipeddi, 2016), judicial corporal punishment (Foucault, 1991), execution, the rape or torture of non-combatants in war (McCarthy, 1973; Stiglmayer, 1994), to encapsulate cultural interventions that respond to atrocities and seek to arouse awareness among the public while furthering new political goals. For nearly two centuries, reformers and abolitionists have combined visual, theatrical, literary and political elements in ways that pay attention to these practices as instrumental *and* expressive projects. In crime and punishment, such appeals to the edifying gaze stood in contrast to the awesome spectacle of harsh judicial punishments which functioned to reiterate the sovereign authority of the ruling order or, as Guy Debord put it, to propagate the state's narcissistic 'self-portrait of power' (1994: 24). Publicity, as a concept and set of practices for refining 'the affective structure of man' is not only steeped in (Western) civilising processes (Elias, 1978), but simultaneously emerged with the 'public sphere' of modern communications as the basis of rational civic life (Habermas, 1992). Elements of that legacy underpin contemporary humanitarian campaigning practices in their commitment to oppositional advocacy and appeals to the citizenry as affective witnesses.

In this vein, the article centres on a re-reading of campaigns which foregrounded the physical and mental pain of those in prisons and detention facilities with a view to applying two concepts that can get to the heart of our understanding of the visual power of suffering. Firstly, I analyse the body in pain from a hermeneutic perspective, that is, as an interpretative medium for unlocking truth and illuminating concealed wrongs, and secondly, the performances under discussion are framed as examples of communicative action connected to goals of achieving justice. These are clearly overlapping concerns, especially as they draw attention to the dissonance between the functions of voyeuristic power and exploitation and their possible justifications when claimed for as humanitarian endeavours.

The discussion is as follows: The first section reprises the iconic status of the body in the scholarly construction of a penal 'semiotics of suffering' from resistant practices that originated with prisoners (Van Leeuwen, 1995). Secondly, the paper traces the permutations of a visual grammar of bodily resistance when translated by activists in(to) the public domain. Thirdly, we examine ethical tensions and justifications which arise when artists or performers consciously assume an interlocutory standpoint by standing in for, and speaking in place of, the original victims. However, in the final part of this paper, attention is paid to the culturally contestable and ambiguous responses that can turn such performances into risky cultural enterprises. A tension lies at the heart of the visual rhetoric of bodily suffering which relies on invoking pity, disgust or outrage, as these both elicit desired empathic responses but also arouse alienation and resistance from spectators. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the precarity as well as potency of the lexicon of bodily suffering in publicity campaigns. The article concludes by suggesting that reliance on tropes of suffering is liable to cultural and social normalisation or discursive clawback towards reactionary and authoritarian agendas. These possibilities call the publicity of suffering into question as an inherently progressive strategy.

The biopolitics of prison resistance

In the sphere of prison struggle, the will to resist manifests in a wide repertoire of disruptive tactics. Protests can start out as covert, individual and unorganised practices that consolidate through repetition, in the process generating group consciousness and collective resistance, and eventually rupturing prison order. Indeed, the prospect for resistance to take hold exists across the range of penal conditions, with the possible exception of extreme environments such as gulags or concentration camps where subversive acts of autonomy lead to certain persecution (Ratushinskaya, 1988). However, because of their unusually well-organised and collective properties, campaigns by prisoners in the context of political conflict have achieved significant *spectacular* successes in recent times. Specifically, the media and research gazes have focused extensively on campaigns such as the hunger-strikes to the death in Northern Ireland (O'Malley, 1990; McEvoy, 2001) and Turkey (Ocalan, 2011: 111-12), or torture or abuses in Palestinian and South African prisons and elsewhere which summon forth global attention but also confirm solidaristic bonds between political prisoners and the streets (Sabo, 2014). Similarly, throughout the contemporary war on terror, detention centres of Abu Ghraib in Iraq and Guantánamo Bay have become reference points not only for military occupation or western imperialism but for the mediated (re)colonisation of conflicts as spectacular global events (Caldwell, 2012; Carrabine, 2011). As 'abject scenographies' pertaining to conditions of captivity have offered up examples of extreme violence and suppression, scholars have found meaning in them as definitive exemplars of globally networked and mediated 'theatres of cruelty' (Artaud in Finburgh, 2017: 34; Begg, 2006; Smith, 2008). In this vein, the bodies of political detainees become enshrined in collective memory as signifiers of greater historical struggles between dominating forces and the resilience of the oppressed.

Beyond these examples, the formal repertoire of tools or artefacts that is available to prisoners is recognisable across different penal cultures and contexts. If highly visible and publicised protests are strongest in the collective consciousness, Scott's (1985: 242) theory of the 'weapons of the weak' finds space for democratising resistance in 'undramatic but ubiquitous' terms in the face of the banality of everyday suffering. Consequently, theoretical interest in the imprisoned body has also connected states of punishment and structural violence with the *routine* conditions by which the confined may exercise agency, identity and power in a myriad of ways. One characteristic approach, adopted by phenomenological (Feldman, 1991; Cho, 2009), Foucauldian and feminist scholars (Sawicki 1991; Shilling, 1993) has focused on prisoners' uses of practices of the self, or even practices *against* the self, as a means of converting pain into instrumental and expressive forms. Accordingly, these practices become both resources and proof of the agency of prisoners as they attempt to move from embodied experience to communicative action. The biopolitical view of prison conflict, then, insists at least on the theoretical potential for expressive autonomy to occur, albeit from profoundly subordinated subjective positions. This has been alternately and contradictorily viewed through paradigms of abjection and post-Foucauldian concepts of agency.

The first strand of ideas comes from the phenomenological concept of abjection and its potential to ontologically rupture the purity of social identities. Kristeva, (1997: 260), for

example, hypothesised that systems maintain symbolic order through constant vigilance against hybrid or monstrous entities, especially where these are embodied in degenerative and subversive bodies. Judith Butler (1993: xiv), likewise, argued that social order has to be made safe from threatening others by establishing 'exclusionary matrices' to isolate and contain the 'domain of abject beings' (Butler, 1993: iii). Although talking about the place of performance and mimicry in subverting the naturalness of gender, Butler's critique also helps us understand how dangerous, self-harming practices by subaltern groups (including prisoners) contest the norms that govern regulatory discipline, for example, by disobeying imperatives to maintain personal health or self-care. Harmful practices of the self might in these instances reinforce resistant identities among groups who are already constructed as disordered, dangerous or contaminated. Similarly, Mary Douglas's (1984) seminal thesis on 'purity and taboo' established that 'dirty', 'impure' and 'profane' practices may be wielded as powerful threats to those orders (institutional and ontological) which derive their authority from their guardianship of propriety, security, wholeness or virtue. Kristeva (1997) makes a similar point about the efficacy of degenerative material (rotten matter, disease, mutiliated bodies, corpses or excrement) which proffer existential threats from *within* social and cultural structures. In short, the metaphysical power of grotesque and strange practices (the abject) derive from the fact that they generate 'deeper levels of significance' because they are disturbing at both 'literal and metaphorical' levels (Aretxaga, 1995: 128).

A second line of argument comes from Foucauldian and feminist thinking which consider prisoner's agency in terms of punishment's productivity, that is, the conditions under which the infliction of pain or imposition of discipline generate counter-practices from victims. Starting from Foucault's (1980: 56) paradigm that the body is a two-way conduit through which power 'after investing itself on the body, finds itself exposed to a counter attack in that same body', several studies have contributed to our understanding of the interplay of power and resistance in struggles over embodied autonomy in the context of penal confinement. Here, tactics of power and resistance are mutually constituted and 'resistance' does not require that the protagonists possess power to equal degrees (Corcoran, 2006: 88-104; White, 2015). The struggle to articulate one's own suffering is an important means by which prisoners lay claim to some form of autonomy, even if it involves objectifying themselves as part of a process of resisting. Likewise, feminist critique connects characteristics (such as gender, race, disability, class, age) with penal formations of discipline and control, thereby allowing closer attention to be paid to these intersecting factors in prisoners' tactics of resistance (Sawicki, 1991; Bordo, 1993). Accordingly, as prisoners experience penal subjugation in its many intersecting forms, their resistant identities are realised through forms of painful practice or self-discipline that have *articular meaning for that group*. Consider how women prisoners regard their superficial compliance with normative feminine roles as forms of covert resistance (Bosworth, 1999). Self-injury (cutting, suicide) is articulated by prisoners as essential 'emotion work' which facilitates their survival and coping (Liebling, 1995; Adler & Adler, 2007; Harner et al., 2011). Prisoners have been found to contaminate and destroy their environments as deliberate gestures of disdain, as well as to make themselves symbolically and physically repellant and therefore, untouchable (O'Malley, 1990).

It is not proposed to venture into the debate as to the ultimate efficacy of expressive forms of resistance or whether they can ever defeat entrenched, institutionalised penal power.

Of course, it is important to inquire whether prison campaigns that do not win material or practical gains for the protesters totally fail in their objectives. However, elevating instrumental tests of success over expressive methods in this way misses the point by obscuring what 'acts of projection' (Scarry, 1987: 316-318) achieve beyond immediate circumstances, especially where the outcomes cannot be easily quantified or forecast. Arguably, protests are limited *because* they remain in isolation and therefore, projecting knowledge about prisoner's grievances beyond their immediate confines is essential for achieving meaningful outcomes, or at least deterring the harshest reprisals. Campaigning thus enlarges the sphere of action for prisoners by spatially and temporally extending their grievances into external domains. The rest of the article considers this transition from privatised suffering to the production of a visual rhetoric of bodily suffering with the aim of arousing public support.

The heuristic role of pain: Proxy bodies

Elaine Scarry's (1987: 3) influential philosophical work, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, opens with the claim that because pain has 'no object in the external world', societies must invent systems of signs for expressing the phenomenon. Because an individual's sensation of pain lacks an external referent, communicating that pain must be realised through the production of artefacts (signs) involving the role of intermediaries (signifiers) through which 'the sufferer or their agent conveys to anyone present the sentient distress of the person' (Scarry, 1987: 15). As the original violence occurring in places of detention is often not witnessed (other than by the perpetrators or victims themselves), it becomes necessary to project versions of these events into the public domain. Into this breach has stepped activists who take an absent prisoner's place by literally interpolating their own body as the raw medium of communication. Furthermore, these reenactments have constant formal features, if we take the staging of forced hunger strikes as an example. The cases of the American writer and feminist activist, Djuna Barnes (1892-1982) and rap singer and political activist, Yasin Bey (1973-) (formerly 'Mos' Def') illustrate the argument.

INSERT Figure 1*:* Front page of *The World* magazine, September 6 1914, depicting Djuna Barnes being 'force fed'.

In 1914, Djuna Barnes was forcibly fed for an article on the controversial practice of forced feeding that was in use on hunger-striking Suffragette prisoners in England and the United States. Barnes subscribed to the stunt journalism approach where reporters took wrote on controversies of the day based on first -and experience. The practice involved inserting feeding tubes through the prisoners' gullet or nostril, allowing liquid to be poured directly into the stomach, administered under medical supervision. Four 'male doctors' conducted the procedures (Barnes did not specify whether her newspaper had hired them or whether they had volunteered). Her account featured on the front cover of *The World* magazine along with a photograph of Barnes lying on a gurney surrounded by the white-coated men who administered the liquid. Her article '*How it feels to be forcibly fed', d*escribed the intense sense of panic, physical pain, nausea and choking that she experienced during the procedure, which she saw through to the end (Barnes, 2005: 163-166). Reflecting on her

own role, Barnes portrayed herself as a 'playactor' and unworthy impersonator of the true subjects of state brutality – the Suffragettes.

> 'If I, playacting, felt my being burning with revolt at this brutal usurpation of my own functions, how they who actually suffered the ordeal in its acutest forms must have flamed at the violation' (Barnes, 2005: 166).

INSERT Figure 2 : Yasiin Bey being forced fed, 1999).

Almost a century later, in 2013, the musician and actor Yasiin Bey undertook to, in his words, 'demonstrate the standard operative procedures for the force-feeding of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay' (Ferguson, 2013). Guantanamo Bay is the site of the United State's off-shore military detention facility in Cuba holding detainees who were renditioned as suspected Islamist protagonists during the 'war on terror'. Bey's ordeal was filmed and made available on the worldwide web to coincide with the start of Ramadan. Bey was dressed in the orange prison overalls that have become visually synonymous with the detainees. His performance followed a similar format to that of Barnes, where his torso, head and legs were secured by straps to a treatment chair before having a stomach tube inserted through his nostrils through which liquid food would be poured. As the tube is inserted through his nostril, Bey's body can be seen to arc in pain and terror as he fights against the choking sensation from the tube. After a second attempt, he pleads for the procedure to stop. The entire event took place within one minute. A witnessing journalist commented, '[s]till chained, this famous artist had become in an instant so small. He seemed overwhelmed by his own brief glimpse at the humiliation that his country inflicts on its prisoners' (Ferguson, 2013).

Although contrasts can be drawn between both cases on historical, class, gender, racial and technological grounds, they also subscribed to common principles. Both Barnes and Bay understood that the visual power of suffering needed to be made more 'real' for the public - which they were willing to substantiate in offering themselves as proxy bodies. More than just storytellers, but less than actual prisoners, proxies inhabit liminal locations – between public and private spaces - and enact secular forms of transubstantiation – shift shaping between image/visual text and flesh. Barnes and Bey were retrospectively troubled by a sense of their inauthenticity, negatively contrasting their vicarious and temporary experiences with the prolonged ordeals suffered by prisoners. Bey had concluded: 'I really couldn't take it'. Barnes summarised her capitulation as her body's betrayal of her will: 'I struggled against surrender. It was the futile defiance of nightmare. *My utter hopelessness was a pain'* (Barnes, 2005: 165: emphasis added). Yet, in crystallising a medicalised aesthetics of punishment, their performances disrupted the humanitarian defence of imprisonment to reveal the retributive and punitive components of penal medicine (Adler and Adler 2007; Seal & Girling, 2016). Although separated by almost a century, both performances embodied a modern triangulation of the mass media, public consumption and the deployment of the social capital of celebrity by those who possessed it.

The body speaks)

The discussion now turns from the experiences of surrogate bodies to stagings that originate with prisoners themselves. A central tenet of Scarry's thesis is that unbearable pain 'destroys language' (1987: introduction), leading to the destruction of victims' capacity to articulate their hideous plight. Intense suffering leaves only vestigial forms of 'verbalisation' at the disposal of 'those who are themselves in pain and … those who wish to speak on behalf of others' (Scarry, 1987: 9). Furthermore, 'this inexpressibility has political consequences – by making overt precisely what is at stake in "inexpressibility"' (Scarry, 1987: 19). That is, the point of publicity is not only to tell others about punishment and suffering but to reveal the conditions of silencing, censorship, mendacity and the suppression of 'conditions of knowledge that others are allowed or disallowed' (Scarry, 1987: 19). These barriers have not closed off nonverbal modes of communication, of course. Rather, they have inspired a myriad of artefacts from a host of 'mediating structures' and 'verbal texts' (such as transcripts of trials, humanitarian reports, medical diagnostics) for arousing humanitarian assistance(Scarry, 1987: 9).

Concomitantly, prisoners may bypass well-intentioned custodianship by publicly projecting their own suffering bodies directly, shockingly and visibly. The shutting off of communicative avenues and the literal shutting up of individuals are metaphysically linked in the practice of mouth-sewing or lip-sewing that emerged in detention centres for displaced persons under Australian jurisdiction, and more sporadically elsewhere (BBC news online, 2011; Al Jazeera, 2015). Detainees sewed up their lips to highlight the poor conditions and indefinite nature of their detention as well as tardiness by governments in processing their cases. Both these acts of wilful self-mutilation themselves *and* the subsequent images of the results powerfully rebuke the muzzling tactics that governments and immigration authorities are accused of in denying prisoners due process or turning down applications for asylum 'unreasonably' or contrary to international law.

INSERT: Figure 3: Lip-sewing by detainees at Nauru detention centre, under Australian jurisdiction, October 2014.

These deeds privilege the body over speech as the primary medium of communication in a manner which figuratively and literally 'moves speech into action' to create powerful modes of 'speech-acts in the context of extended communication situations' (Assmann, 2006: 75). The sewn-up mouths of prisoners assume a form of 'symbolic speech', allowing detainees' stories to be externalised while bypassing officialdom or transcending language barriers (Kanaboshi, 2014). In this way, their bodies become both message and medium.

One might also discern in these scenes elements of a Rabelesian 'carnivalesque' where the quotidian order is 'turned upside down' and a repressed, subaltern consciousness allowed to surface (Bakhtin, 1994). Similarly, activist performances summons forth profane spaces where symbolic and social orders are inverted. For theorists influenced by Bakhtin, as with the phenomenologists, gruesome spectacles offer numerous subversive possibilities. This is all the more so if rituals of suffering are collectivised. The mass death fasts by prisoners and sympathisers outside prison that took place in Turkey in 2001 underline the point. Figure 4

depicts the hunger strike of Zehra Kulaksiz close to end of her life. Kulaksiz (1979-2001) a student at Instanbul University and member of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party – Front (DHKP-C)[i] joined other political activists from revolutionary and separatist movements in a sychronised solidarity strike with their comrades in several Turkish prisons. Kulaksi and her comrades' fates could be documented, updated daily and broadcast on the worldwide web because they took place in 'resistance houses' - communal households of ex-prisoners and activists that were that were located in safe enclaves on the fringes of Ankara and Instanbul. Kulakhziz died after 221 days on hunger strike three weeks after her sister's death from hunger strike.[ii] They were among seven 'civilians', supporters and relatives of prisoners, who died alongside 48 prisoners. At its peak, 1500 prisoners and followers took part in the prison protests. A total of 122 deaths occurred during the campaign, including from self-immolations and deaths during treatment, before being called off in 2002.

INSERT Figure 4: Zehra Kulaksiz starves to death in a 'safe house', Turkey 2001.

This power of subversion recalls Scarry's thesis that while pain unmakes the world of the sufferer, the publicity of pain, its transportation to public view, plays a crucial role in 'reordering the world' (1987: Part 2). As if to emphasise the cycle of subversion and restoration, extreme mortification is juxtaposed against the indifference of the powerful to exert a mesmerizing narrative power (Ellman, 1997: 58-89). Kulaksiz's agonies in the presence of a male (reportedly her father) (Guardian, 2001) resembles an inverted Pieta – the traditional art form depicting the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus which is central to sacrificial meaning in Western Christendom. Equally, this figuration of martyrdom and loss, embodied in the dying pains of hunger strikers, confronts the penal excesses of the state. Any pretensions that extreme physical suffering has disappeared from the modern prison system are disproved by primordial exhibitions of corporal pain. In this way, spectacular suffering assumes a politically transfigurative role which allows truth to address power and unmask the fictitious clemency of the powerful. The contrast between the disappearing body and the symbolic amplification of the loss and destruction of life could hardly be starker. As the starving body wastes away, the chorus of humanitarian protest is nourished. As Cho (2009: 117: emphasis added) in her study of self-immolation as public protest observed:

> Through transforming its powerless physical form into a powerful moral statement, the fasting body of hunger strikers calls into question the legitimacy of the authorities…. Witnessing the body's self-consumption turns public attention to the authority's intransigence. As the physical body of the striker diminishes, its rhetorical efficacy grows, *as long as it succeeds in eliciting witnesses of the larger audience* (Cho, 2009: 117: emphasis added).

Activating solidarity

At this point, it may be useful to consider how 'truth' is simultaneously constructed and contested by protagonists in these situations. Campaigns tend to be constructed around a series of moral contrasts. In the formal sense, the tableaux discussed above play upon narrative conventions that induce a highly normative emotional range in their appeals to

familiar tropes: suffering, abjection, passivity, besieged identity, confinement, victimization and humiliation. By extension, publicists seek to requisition moral authority in the act of unmasking the fictions of official discourse. Most obviously, performers become gatekeepers of a sort, as conduits between hidden corners of the state and the public domain. Because the campaigners (and by extension, their audiences) are denied access to actual conditions of incarceration, especially where torture or mistreatment is alleged, they are obliged to improvise from available testimonies or eye witness accounts. The ensuing spectacles involve a social dimension of exchange which unites the victims (prisoners), the performers and audiences in indicting the absent culprits – prison authorities and the state.

Moreover, such improvisations acquire further ethical merit by openly revealing themselves as constructs. As visible constructs, they are fictions by necessity because of the opacity and mendacity of state or prison officials or their agents. Campaigners have at their disposal the moral defence that their imperfect reconstructions are substitutes for an otherwise unknowable truth. In this context, the conspicuous absence of truth becomes as important (if not more important) to the project of publicity as the retrieving first-hand accounts of the conditions of detention. If the content of campaign material is later be found to be inaccurate or unfaithful to the facts, this can be attributed to the control of information by prison or state authorities, who are both custodians of the prisoners and of the details about what has happened to them. In aspiring to the virtues of transparency, campaigning truths are distinguishable from the artifice of official accounts which masquerade as authoritative truths (but which, by clear implication, they are not).

Acts of representation prompt us to interrogate the motives and ethics of interlocutors who assume the position of standing in for, and speaking in the place of, those who are silenced. They turn our ethical and criminological focus onto the obligations that inhere with de-institutionalising stories from prisons or detention centres by turning them over to the public domain in direct and supposedly authentic forms. The implication here is that when the sole right to speak is taken out of the control of authoritative domains such as politics, prison administration, law or medicine, it becomes a more virtuous order of discourse, one which both disrupts official discourse *and* is difficult to morally refute. Yet, the interdependence of these protagonists reveals a paradox of publicity: the deliberate infliction of pain by the state is at once comprehensible as a demonstration of its 'fiction of power' (Scarry, 1987) while the display of suffering caused in part by the state is essential to the articulation of moral censure (Cohen, 2001).

Contrary readings: the limits of the politics of pity:

The objective of publicité - in the Habermasian sense of 'making public' – is to project matters of collective importance into the public sphere with the aim of inducing social action (Habermas, 1992). Its purpose is to move spectators from inertia to political activit or to socialise experiences of powerlessness, frustration and anger by offering individuals access to a communal – if vicariously cathartic - moment. This presupposes that citizens assume a civic subjectivity which conjoins them in conveying collective moral censure for transgression and arousing compassionate empathy for the wronged. Publicity in this sense momentarily strengthens solidarity and recognition. Scarry (1987: 170) validates this

humanist faith in 'the work of externalisation' as 'it is through this movement out into the world that the extreme privacy of the occurrence … begins to be sharable, that sentience becomes social and thus acquires a distinctly human form'. Corradi (2006: 4) observes that the establishing a dialogue between performers and spectators is an essential condition for 'closing the cognitive gap between the reality that is before me and what I, in human terms, manage to imagine about it'. Importantly, however, the incitement to witness elicits conflicting emotions:

> … of *disgust* in seeing a martyred body; of *pain* because of the suffering of the victim; of *perturbatio*n in imagining the fury of the aggressor; of *pity* at the killing (or injury) of another human being; of *fear* that it can happen again, perhaps to me (Corradi, 2006: 4: emphasis in the original).

If spectacular suffering is meant to accomplish the collapse of a dominant symbolic order by eliciting a crisis of belief (Scarry, 1985: 14), it is a risky enterprise. One of the unforeseen dangers of propagating signs is that they cannot be relied on to retain their original meanings. Signs are unstable and susceptible of more open-ended or closed readings on the part of audiences than can be anticipated by their creator. Thus, the intention to invoke outrage, compassion or understanding can be resisted or contrarily apprehended by the same public(s). The literature is replete with instances where the public has turned against alienating, bizarre or transgressive practices. Famously, the 'dirty protests' in Northern Ireland between 1976 and 1981 evinced widespread confusion and repudiation. Denied recognition as political prisoners, Republican prisoners took to wearing blankets instead of prison uniforms and withstood constant lockdown in conditions where their cell windows 'were blocked, they smeared the[ir] faeces on the cell walls and ceiling or shoved it under … cell doors. It was disgusting, putrid, repulsive – and it didn't work' (O' Malley, 1990: 22).

INSERT: Figure 5: Mairéad Farrell on dirty protest, Armagh prison, Northern Ireland, 1980.

A further tipping point towards public alienation occurred after women joined the no-wash strike in 1980. Figure 5 depicts the soiled cell of Mairéad Farrell, commanding officer of the Irish Republican Army prisoners in Armagh Women's Prison. Aretxaga (1995: 144-5) posited that the 'overdetermination of their gender' which was 'crystallised around the meaning of sexual difference' ultimately displaced the political objects of the protests with preoccupations about cultural and national integrity. The women's protests divided feminists (who charged women prisoners with collusion in patriarchal violence) (McCafferty, 1981) as well as nationalists for their assault on conservative social sensibilities, for transgressing the sanctity and dignity of the nation, and as an unwanted reminder of colonial slanders against 'the Dirty Irish', which the prisoners had shamefully revived (Corcoran, 2006: 175-181). In Turkey, also, the relentless parade of dying prisoners ended with 'the public's growing acceptance of and indifference to these tragedies' (Bargu, 2014: 5).

The power of transgressive bodies to provoke cultural disarray enters into a symbiotic dynamic with political anxiety and authoritarian reaction. In 2016, protests on Nauru and Manus detention facilities escalated to cases of self-cutting and self-immolation, arguably

linked with the authorities' imperviousness to previous lip-sewing and hunger strikes. As if to emphasise the state's immunity to manipulation, the Minister for Immigration, Peter Dutton, invoked directed his 'frustration and anger' at conspirators from NGOs: 'who are encouraging some of these people to behave in a certain way, believing that that pressure exerted on the Australian Government will see a change in our policy in relation to our border protection measures' (Fiske, 2016).

It is necessary to grasp the contingency and temporality of semiotic production to explain 'undesirable' forms of spectatorship by non-conforming, even resistant, onlookers. The polyvalency of signs, which carry several values and meanings at once opens communicative practices to patriarchal or racist clawback and subornment to reactionary social or cultural norms (Van Leeuwen, 1995). Impromptu video footage of self-immolations by detainees at Nauru, taken in the act by horrified onlookers, attest to the more autonomous properties of contemporary cultural production, which in turn loosens the didactic authority of traditional intermediaries. Habermasian faith in the solidaristic public sphere has given way to a multiplicity of spaces populated by oppositional counter-publics (Fraser, 1990), including those hostile to 'progressive' agendas. Humanist faith in publicity understates its dark side, which is inexorably connected to expressive rituals of voyeuristic gratification, banal indifference, hostility, sadism, racism, and vicious revenge fantasies. As Carrabine (2011: 9) reminds us, 'grotesque violence is deeply embedded in human storytelling, suggesting that the desire for disturbing imagery and horrific stories is not a pathological departure from social norms [but] deeply embedded within them'.

Conclusion

Bodily and mental suffering are familiar tropes in the rhetoric of prison campaigns. Material and symbolic artefacts proliferate in social spaces with the intention of inducing a sense of urgency and immediacy of action. Although this article accedes to the visual and persuasive power of such performances, especially where they utilise overstatement, dramatisation and hyperbole, it also argues that representations of abjection are open to normative, reactionary or resistant readings. Tropes of suffering and sacrifice do not always translate into emancipatory consciousness or practices. Their very ambivalence renders them susceptible to appropriation by normative penal, disciplinary or coercive rationalities. It is essential, therefore, to remember aspects of contingency, risk and vulnerability inherent to resistant practices.

In paying attention to the role of embodied and mediated performances, we are provoked into considering the relational and communicative claims that are at stake. In the first instance, the act of assuming intermediary status (by figuratively representing victims) and inter-locution (by speaking *for* victims *to* others) functions as a kind of subjective transference where the embodiment and experience of suffering passes from the prisoner to the performer. Such corporal interpellation by proxy invokes charges of appropriation and objectification, even where performers knowingly work within existing power relationships and justify their work in terms of 'strategic objectification' for humanitarian ends (McLagan, 2002: 106). Furthermore, our focus on performance as an exercise in

political consciousness-raising draws attention to the normative underpinnings of didactic theories of communication which rely on shared interpretations between producers and audiences. Problematically, publicity in the Habermasian sense presupposes consensually-bounded public and private spheres as well as (bourgeois) sensibilities and forms of social capital that exclude subaltern class, racial and gender interests in the making of culture (Fraser, 1990). From that, we can infer that the campaigning performers can unwittingly assume roles as didactic guides and guardians of desirable forms of consciousness.

Two patterns begin to emerge, apparently contradictory, but it transpires, part of a subtler set of relationships. Performance activism may be understood in terms of didactic linearity which 'presupposes and confirms the existence of a relatively passive, never fully initiated, voyeuristic laity that is regularly convoked to watch, listen, read or hear – and then sent away' (Sontag, 1983: 185). Alternatively, performativity belongs to a chain of relationships which are fluid, contingent, in constant formation and unpredictable, in short, as relational and subject to contestation and power.

The shock of suffering plays a part in creating a deliberative politics of justice and penal reform. Humanitarian campaigns proceed from the position that, lacking a voice and depending on intermediaries, prisoners must be spoken for, mediated, interpreted and explained, sometimes in ways that reinforce dominant ideological commitments. The field of prison activism and scholarship is replete with complex ethical questions surrounding vulnerability, trust and unequal power relations. These questions remain primary reference points for critical and activist discourse and are reminders that seemingly progressive strategies for telling the stories of the confined can collude, however unintentionally, with reactionary imaginaries.

[i] Members of Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Partisi- Cephesi or Revolutionary People's Liberation Party – Front (DHKP-C).

[ii] The Turkish campaign distinguished between a hunger strike or abstention from nourishment on a temporary basis, and its more advanced form, the death fast. The fasters' decline was protracted because they survived on a sugar and saltwater mixture. By comparison, for example, the Northern Ireland hunger strikers in 1980 died between 56 and 74 days of total abstention from nourishment (Flackes and Elliott, 1994: 177).

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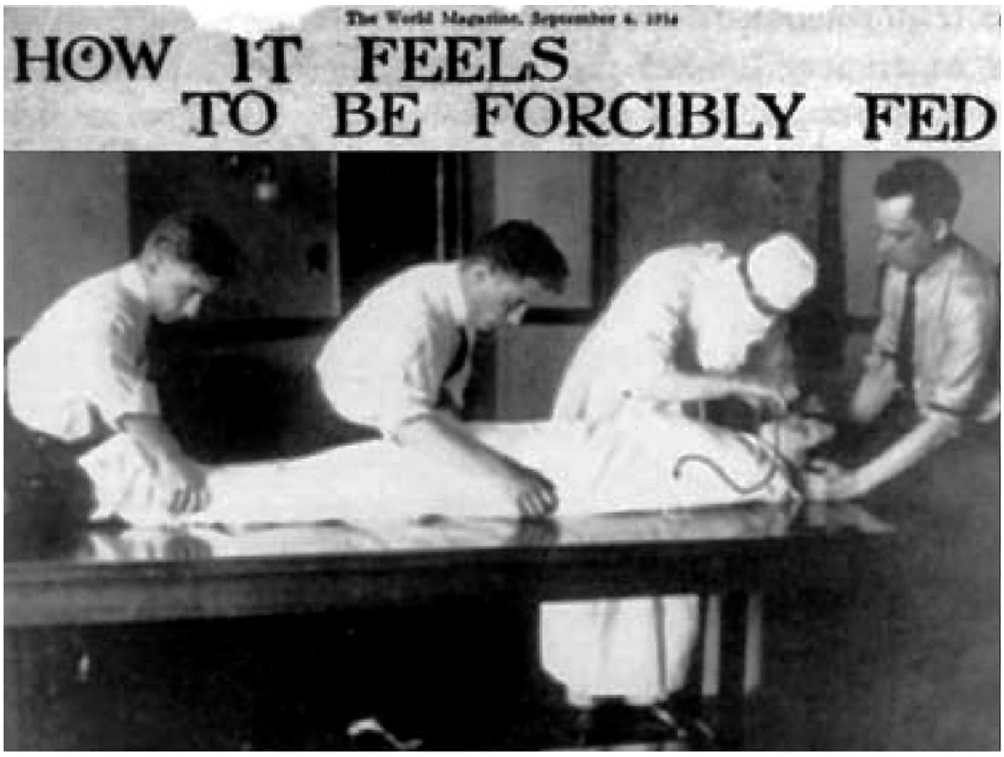

Figure 1 Front page of The World magazine, September 6 1914, depicting Djuna Barnes being 'force fed'.

378x282mm (72 x 72 DPI)

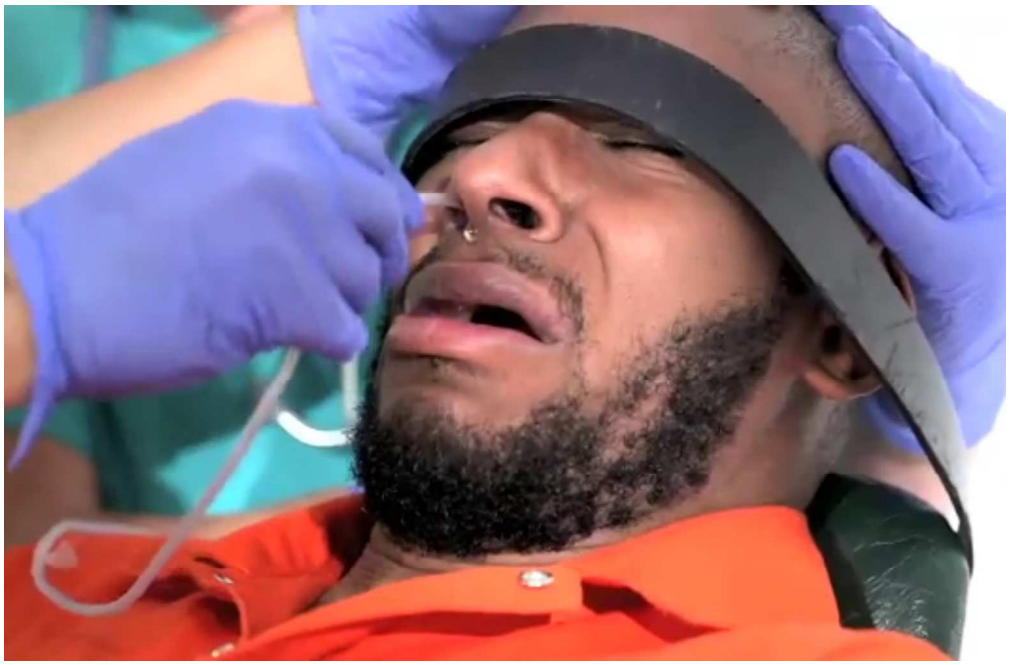

Figure 2: Yasiin Bey being force fed, 2013.

1198x783mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Figure 3: Lip sewing at Nauru detention camp

475x305mm (72 x 72 DPI)

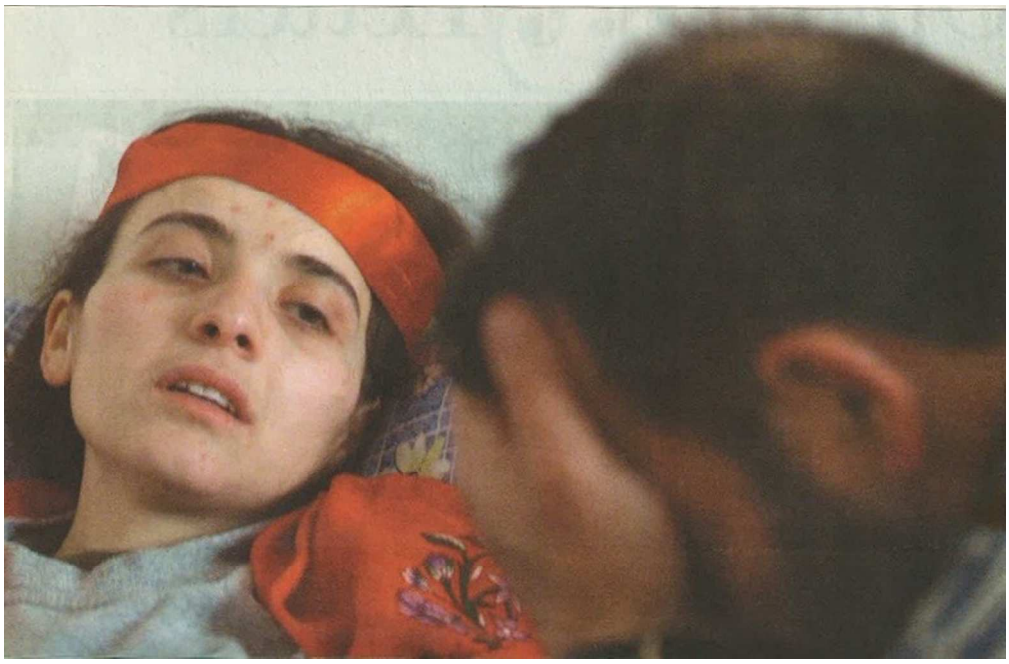

Figure 4: Zehra Kulaksiz starves to death in a 'safe house', Turkey, 2001.

257x167mm (72 x 72 DPI)

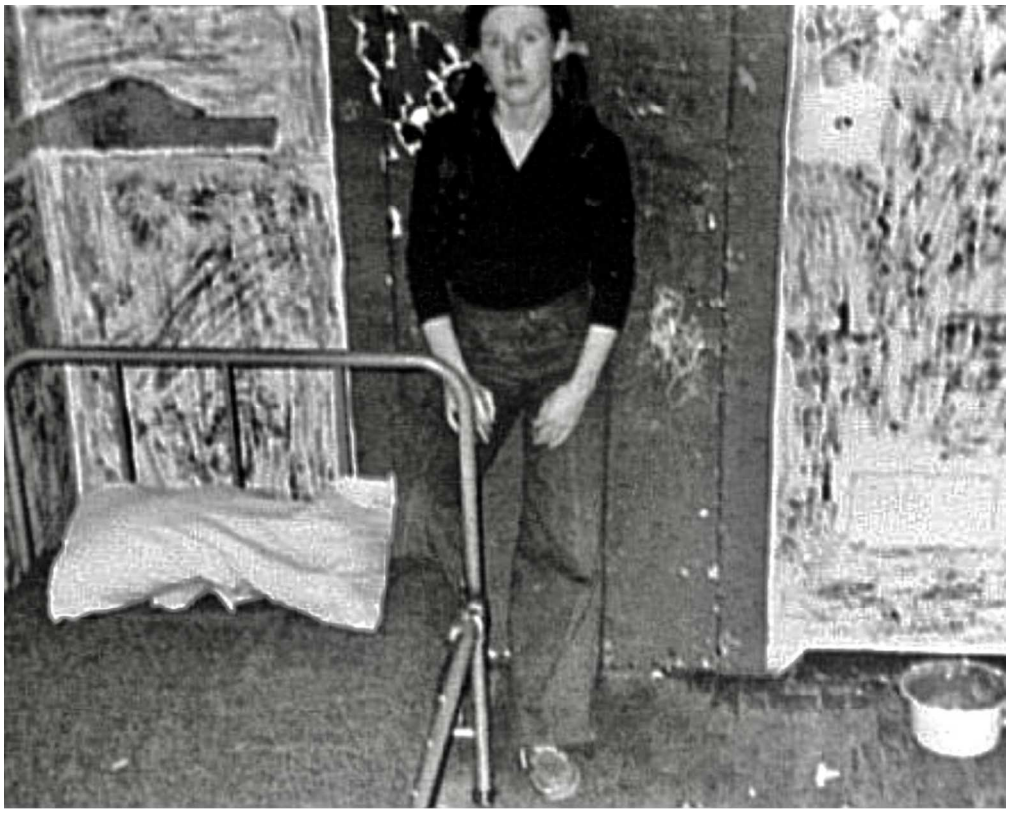

Figure 5: Mairéad Farrell on dirty protest, Armagh Prison, Northern Ireland, 1980.

403x324mm (72 x 72 DPI)