

Evading the Media: Cinematic Techniques of Media Memory in *Elephant* and *Hunger*

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Our experience of the present is always already (media) memory, and this memory represents the recaptured attempt at self-presence: possessing the experience in order to possess the memory, in order to possess the self.¹

Introduction

Repetition is a key component of mass media production and in relation to the news media is central to its description of violent events through a fetishistic concentration on visual image over historical context. This is not to say that there is not a spectrum of discursive positions articulated within the news media,² but that the focus on what David Altheide calls ‘event-type’ news format of regular evening news broadcasts tends to be more ideologically constrained than ‘topic-type’ formats associated with interviews and documentary presentations.³ Following a format driven by economies of habit and familiarity, the media’s presentation of events settles on the repetition of the different as same. The broadcast media, of course, are not merely the neutral carrier of messages but consist of a network of practices that generate a logics of representation that produces a constant remediation of images anchored by a rhetorical frame driven by repetition. However, a creative practice can seek to disrupt the familiar and habitual and escape the limits of the mass media through the isolating of elements of a perceptual register and rearranging them to a potentially more disruptive effect. This article will consider just such a creative reconfiguration by two filmmakers, Alan Clarke and Steve McQueen, each of whom takes elements of (media) memory and produces a startling and disturbing work of repetition that takes as their subject the 1980s conflict in Northern Ireland. Repetition here works as a marker of a creative difference where the act itself is used as an active force to subvert and question the authority of the media.⁴ Each filmmaker, in different ways that bear detailed consideration, repeats earlier representations in a series of

reflections that inaugurate a difference that builds into a challenge to the majoritarian style of media sameness.

For both of the filmmakers under consideration here, we will see that the central medium of communication that motivated them was the television news. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this imagery offered an already established resource from which to draw upon for a rather more reflective practice as filmmakers. Similarly, both filmmakers were located during the 1980s in London and therefore viewed the conflict through the mediation of the television screen. In those 'old media' analogue days consumption of the evening news had a ritualistic quality and reminds us of the centrality of television to family life at this time.

In a wider sense, the concept of repetition works in other ways. For instance, in terms of rehearsal and the tradition of oral narration, repetition is used as an aid to memorization. Such a practice of linking repetition with memory can be seen as powerful aspect of media production that places 'disruptive' identities in opposition to 'reasonable' voices, as research by the GUMG during the 1970s and 1980s clearly showed: 'In essence our case is that the numerical repetition of certain themes and explanations, together with the embracing and underlining of them by media personnel, are part of a general process by which the news is produced from within a limited and partial view'.⁵ This is precisely why, of course, the British government during the period of the conflict was constantly attempting to influence and control news media coverage of Northern Ireland and it is expressed most concisely in the reminder from Prime Minister Edward Heath's to Lord Widgery as he was about to embark on the inquiry into the civilian deaths on Bloody Sunday in 1972: 'It had to be remembered that we were in Northern Ireland fighting not only a military war but the propaganda war'.⁶

Similarly, the shift in strategy by the British government to managing the province saw a key component of this in the process of 'normalisation' and the parallel adoption by Provisional IRA of a shift to a lower intensity 'Long War'. In this context, therefore, the news media coverage of the conflict replicated the emerging pattern of atrocity, grief and moral condemnation. As the media analyst David Miller writes, the shift towards this policy of reconstituting the conflict within social democratic norms saw a reduction of available security information and a lessening of coverage of the army's role.⁷ For the audience on the mainland with little or no direct experience of Northern Ireland it can be argued that as fewer casualties were army personal there became a return to the sense of distance from the conflict and a reliance on the terms of interpretation perpetuated by print and television media, as subsequent research showed.⁸

Miller argues in his image-based research of audience memories of the conflict that the most common were of violence or atrocities and that they were sourced primarily from the media.

It is in this context that, in quite different ways and twenty years apart, Clarke and McQueen work to evade the patterns of memory and media image to challenge the habitual frame of reference and televisual conventions that defined it. Both employ radically challenging strategies of repetition in a productive process of innovation that seek to force new thinking on the subject.⁹ Repetition, memory and the image have a potential for creative reorganisation that can, at the very least, challenge something of the hegemony of the mass media and produce a reflexive response to violent and traumatic events.

***Elephant*: Creative Repetition**

Elephant (1988) was directed by the British filmmaker Alan Clarke and produced by Danny Boyle based, at that time, at BBC Northern Ireland. A number of incisive and well-written analyses of the film have addressed issues of its form and its radical use of steadicam to produce a very singular representation of sectarian murders.¹⁰ The focus here is in terms of how it is generated by, and seeks to work against, the prevailing media coverage of the conflict on the British mainland.

Clarke died in 1990 and *Elephant*, shot in 1987, was broadcast in 1989 on BBC2. Boyle makes it clear that after considering various more conventional narratives of the experiences of those in Northern Ireland they shifted towards the idea of an abstracted piece of filmmaking that would play against the familiar audience expectation on the mainland:

I realized that all people in England tended to pay attention to was a particularly savage or brutal sort of killing, usually involving a figure from the 'mainland' as it's called, and a British soldier often as not. They weren't even interested in RUC men being killed, never mind local people. And I got hold of extraordinary statistics from the RUC which said that a hundred and twenty people were being killed each year, regularly. And yet the reports in London gave you the impression that it was fifteen or twenty killings, those being mainly soldiers and people with families in Sheffield who could be contacted for comment by the newspapers.¹¹

Described as a 'hierarchy of victimhood' this devaluation of civilian deaths local to Northern Ireland could be sustained by a media practice that had settled into a pattern of limited and habitual reporting on the region.

Elephant was a concerted attempt to counter the media discourse on the conflict that sought to present in a graphic and more un-media-ated way something of what he saw as the reality of the endless series of murders that occurred in the province during the 1980s. To do this Clarke adopted a radically formalist style that stripped away all dialogue that might provide an easily identifiable frame of reference for the killings. Over the course of nearly forty minutes we follow a series of individual men who move through the empty landscape of a post-industrial Belfast to locate their victims before shooting them. We witness in this way the killings of eighteen individuals. This is the film from which Gus Van Sant would take for the title of his own reflection on the domestic terrorism of the Columbine school massacre in 2003. He would also take some of Clarke's formal experimentation, especially the use of steadicam, to construct a fluid subjectivity of spectatorship that, Richard Kirkland argues, is precisely where *Elephant*'s 'ethical position resides'.¹²

The title of the film refers to a description offered by Bernard McClaverty, as to how the violent deaths in the ongoing conflict were the 'elephant in the room', that is, everyone knew that it was there but pretended to ignore it. We can, however, also read the title in terms of how 'an elephant never forgets' and consider this in relation to memory as act of repetition. Clearly, the absence of any dialogue in the film points to the difficulty of talking about paramilitary violence in a productive way throughout this period where, as Martin McLoone wrote prior to the 1994 ceasefire and the establishment of overt negotiations between Republican's and the British government, 'In our political discourse, we have never managed to talk effectively about paramilitaries, never mind talking to them'.¹³

According to Boyle the film was never intended to be transmitted in the North of Ireland:

The intention was not to show the film in NI because everybody was aware [. . .] people lived with this day in and day out they were very conscious of it. Unfortunately it went out in Northern Ireland as well as the rest of the UK and it upset people there because they didn't need to see this kind of film [. . .] it was more for the mainland and the way that the [. . .] our relationship to the press and what the press had chosen to show us of Northern Ireland had actually immunised to what was actually going on there.¹⁴

So, from the beginning the question of a specifically British audience is central to the construction of the film. This is a film that is working against

what it sees as the force of media representation of the conflict that seems uninterested in the scale of civilian death. According to the British Film Institute screenonline entry for Alan Clarke on Northern Ireland written by Justin Hobday:

The relentlessness of the executions serves as both a reflection of the cycle of violence in which the province became trapped during the period, and an attempt to undermine the neutralizing effect of sanitized TV news coverage.¹⁵

But does Clarke, in a way that echoes that of the media, effectively efface any differences between these acts reducing the series to the same repeated over and over? The difference here seems to reside in the fact that he pushes this beyond any comfortable consumption of the image. He creatively takes the limits of the media coverage and pushes them to agonising limits. Similarly, the lack of dialogue or voices in the film was used strategically to ease the acceptance of the project within the BBC, as Boyle recounts: ‘Of course, nobody was going to speak in this, you weren’t to know who was who. It was abstract, in a way’,¹⁶ but pushes the tolerance of the viewer to a point of feeling an overwhelming demand *for* dialogue. This space can, of course, merely be filled by an interior voice set within familiar thinking and in that way does not offer an alternative narrative offered by the media.

The repetition at work in the film ultimately resolves into an internalised violence as we see the final victim aware of his own imminent death. This might reinforce the idea of the conflict in the north itself in the terms of atavistic violence often offered but the compulsive repetition can be argued to turn back on the audience on the mainland *against* itself rather than as over there in Northern Ireland. It may be pessimistic but can that pessimism be of the tolerance of the British public to the decontextualized news coverage rather than the reality of the murders themselves that, as outsiders, Boyle and Clarke knew they could never access? As David Thomson argues, ‘*Elephant* reflects upon the habit and the indifference Britain has had to learn for the Irish body count’.¹⁷

To repeat eighteen times with minor variations the act of murder is, at the very least, consciously designed to move beyond mere attention to the horror of what we see. The shift to a slightly different location, with different actors, and different weapons, introduces an intensification and sense of shock that locates this within the everyday, suggestive of a filmmaker such as Robert Bresson. Of course, there is the danger that once stripped of context repetition is presented as compulsion: a compulsion to murder positioned at the atavistic end of the spectrum that can reinforce the

very reading of the Irish conflict seemingly opposed by Clarke. This draws attention, therefore, to the limits of such a filmic practice that foregrounds its aesthetic technique. Nevertheless, by positioning itself at the creation end of the spectrum as opposed to the information end it draws useful attention to an awareness of the contaminated nature of that communication.

The potential to create reflexive circuits between image, memory and thinking about the Northern Irish conflict can be seen in the British artist Steve McQueen's film *Hunger*.

Hunger: Creative Remediation

It is significant that David Miller, in his analysis of media coverage of the conflict, argues that the policy of normalisation was severely challenged by the republican hunger strikes and the media coverage it generated.¹⁸ This disruptive event was precisely what the artist Steve McQueen returned to in his film from 2008.

When asked in interviews about where he got the idea for the film, McQueen consistently refers to a childhood memory as the defining starting point. In one interview for the *Tate Etc.* magazine he says:

I remember as an 11 year-old seeing Bobby Sands on BBC news every night. There was a number underneath his image, and I thought that was his age, but I noticed that each night the number increased, and I realised that wasn't his age, it was the number of days he had gone without food. To an 11 year old, the idea of someone who in order to be heard was not eating left an impression on me. I don't know why this image stayed with me, but it is a very strong memory.¹⁹

And in another:

A still image would appear behind the newsreader, with a number on the photograph, and every day it would go higher. In order to be heard, the person stopped eating. It's very oral: food not going in, words coming out louder. It was a coming-of-age situation. The same year was the Brixton Riots and Tottenham winning the F.A. cup.²⁰

It is worth considering this in a little more detail to open up these reminiscences to closer scrutiny. Firstly, he locates the impulse to begin the long arduous process of constructing the film in a 'very strong' childhood memory of sitting watching the evening news and seeing an item on the hunger strikes in the Maze prison. This reminds us of the point made earlier

of the once central place of television in the family home as the consolidator of the family unit and, indeed, to the collective memory of the nation itself. Secondly, for a British audience, awareness and understanding of the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland was fundamentally mediated through the television news coverage broadcast by the two terrestrial channels. This coverage clearly acted as an interpretive frame by which the terms of the conflict were established and perpetuated. Much work has been done that maps out the contours of news media coverage of this period in relation to bias towards powerful actors in society and mass communication research that develops out of frame analysis, a concept defined by Gregory Bateson as ‘a spatial and temporal bonding of a set of interactive messages’.²¹ Indeed, for some media theorists the news has become less a source of information and critical investigation and has moved more towards shallow entertainment:

At the root of all this misinformation is a lack of historical and political context in reporting. Whether it is conflict on picket lines or the latest crisis in the peace process in Northern Ireland, the explanatory potential of the news is found wanting. All too often journalists rely on being drip fed by ‘official’ sources or fall back on lazy clichés that present conflicts and carnage in terms of tragedy or evil.²²

A defining aspect of the coverage of the conflict was censorship, where there was a high level of state management, both overt and covert, of the presentation of opinions that were contrary to the official line, as Bill Rolston argues: ‘The British media thus played a key role in building a consensus around the issue of Ireland and conflict. More crucially, that consensus was closely aligned to the state’s explanation of the conflict’.²³ Access to the Maze prison complex was heavily controlled and there are only 90 seconds of television footage of the blanket protest itself, although enough to generate one iconic work of art by the British artist Richard Hamilton, and indeed this ban on access extended to *Hunger* itself which was refused permission to film on the premises. The news coverage McQueen refers to would have consisted of a photographic image of Sands and the number of days on hunger strike. He doesn’t mention the voice of the newsreader that, in its BBC English, would have presented the details of the campaign in long-established ‘neutral’ terms, but it is something he makes use of in the film itself.

For McQueen, the memory from childhood leaves a deep impression and one that he connects to a ‘coming-of-age’, that is, a defining phase in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is a particular

period in life where there is an inherent fluidity as identity is negotiated and the body is interpellated through forces of socialization and repression. By referencing the Brixton Riots and football culture McQueen identifies other arenas of symbolic and actual conflict that he identifies as key elements of his own individual development in the wider of context early 1980s London. Now, this is not to overstate any political connections that McQueen draws and, as he says in another interview with the *New York Times*:

Bobby Sands didn't stay in my psyche, but that moment did. You tend to forget things: you grow up, you get pubic hair, you get taller and then you reconnect with certain things. So I've made a feature film about it.²⁴

Indeed, it is perhaps accurate to say that in many respects McQueen has not made a film about Bobby Sands at all, rather, a mediation on memory, the body, and film as an aesthetic and creative practice.²⁵ I want to consider the cinematic aesthetic of McQueen from the perspective of his relation to the broadcast media as a reference point for his choices for, as Friedrich Kittler observes: 'Media "define what constitutes reality"; they are always already ahead of aesthetics'.²⁶

McQueen in his recall also articulates very effectively the relationship between hunger and speech: 'It's very oral: food not going in, words coming out louder'. We can consider words here as a signifying system of meaning, to be contested and challenged, and words as sound. This latter register is the focus here and considered, in the way that Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith describes in relation to McQueen's artistic practice as mobilized within *Hunger*, as 'sound in its phenomenal rather than its systemic, which is to say linguistic, aspect'.²⁷ It is not so much what is said per se but the processes of sound-making that function beyond the textual and as such connect with the visual to produce an effect that operates beyond the narrative as story. For the films considered here, sound, voice, and, indeed, the absence of either, is considered as central to the production of an inherently reflexive mediation on media and the conflict: a remediation.

Speaking itself in this context, of course, has a particular resonance in that the direct speech of members of the PIRA and others was banned from being broadcast in the UK, as they had been since 1971 in the Republic of Ireland. In a statement to the House of Commons on the 19th October 1988 Home Secretary Douglas Hurd announced:

I have today issued to the chairmen of the BBC and the IBA a Notice, under the Licence and Agreement and under the Broadcasting Act 1987 respectively, requiring them to refrain from broadcasting direct statements by representatives of organisations proscribed in Northern Ireland and Great Britain and by representatives of Sinn Féin, Republican Sinn Féin and the Ulster Defence Association. The Notices will also prohibit the broadcasting of statements by any person which support or invite support for these organisations.²⁸

In response to this, the broadcast media, whilst following the letter of the law, effectively subverted the ban by employing actors to lip-synch the voices of members of the proscribed organisation being interviewed on camera and led one writer to describe the ban as perhaps being ‘among the least effective attempts at censorship in media history’.²⁹ A culture of voiceover practice developed over the period of the ban from 1988 until its repeal in 1994 with its own characteristics of tone and dramatisation that was a point of much discussion between the actors and producers.³⁰ Clearly, then, there is an issue of how to address this speech element in any representation of the conflict.

Since its release in 2008, McQueen’s film has generated a significant amount of critical response that indicates something of the power of both its subject matter and cinematic aesthetic. Here, the emphasis is on some of the issues relating to memory and its activation employed by McQueen. It is noticeable that when McQueen talks of his memories of the hunger strikers on TV he mentions only visual references – there is no discussion of auditory or other registers. However, when he comes to discuss the making of the film he speaks of how he wishes to expand the range of viewer experience via the paradox of switching between sensory registers: ‘I want to show what it was like to see, hear, smell and touch in the H-Block in 1981’.³¹

McQueen himself is adamant that this is not simply a recollection recalled as through the mists of time: ‘The situation wasn’t, as a child, a clouded memory. As a child, it is a sensation’.³² So, he is already moving away from memory as merely image to be recalled and towards memory as something embodied. What he sets out to do is less simply a re-enactment, although he goes to great lengths to maintain fidelity to the conditions going so far as having the cell sets ‘dressed’ by ex-prisoners, and more an activation that has both the blindness and insight of a recollection reconfigured around a work of imaginative re-creation. This is an important distinction as it emphasizes how the location of the practice within a sphere defined by these artistic terms challenges the expectations of a work that is driven by a rather more simplistic notion of representation. As Deleuze and

Guattari write:

Creative fabulation has nothing to do with a memory, however exaggerated, or with fantasy. In fact, the artist, including the novelist, goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived. The artist is a seer, a becomer.³³

This move away from resemblance, although not an abandonment of it as we have seen, shifts the terms towards the idea of becoming and zones of indetermination where the ‘material passes into sensation’.³⁴

There is, therefore, a different notion of memory in operation here. Rather than the idea of summoning up an old perception as an exercise in re-construction McQueen inverts the prism to expand into a zone of absence. For McQueen it is the disappearance of this event from official history that propels his vision of the event. If his memory of the past is a virtual realm of potential actualization then his activation is one facing the present rather than the past and perhaps explains his minimizing of the particular politics of the event in favour of one coloured by reference to Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. McQueen expresses a fascination with childhood and refusal to eat as something through which he can create something more than a return, something echoed by Deleuze and Guattari when they announce: ‘We write not with childhood memories but through blocs of childhood that are the becoming-child of the present’.³⁵ This notion of an active memory is one informed by a Bergsonian theory of recollection where what is accessed is something that might be considered as a sheet or plane out of which a pattern, precisely as McQueen articulates it, can be ascertained. Any repetition at work here is a repetition compelled by a leap into the past that synthesises as something new.

A compelling aspect of *Hunger* is its incredibly economic use of dialogue and as sense of the very considered use of sound by McQueen to produce affect. For McQueen, the sound design was fundamentally important and key to his world on screen. He has spoken of how he considered this aspect of the film:

Sound, for me, was the most important part of the film because it fills the spaces where the camera just can’t go. A sound can give you the dimensions of a room. It can give you smell, it can give you tension. In some ways sound can travel itself into other areas of our senses, other areas of our psyche that unfortunately cannot be just viewed.³⁶

His spare aesthetic and minimal dialogue through much of the film force the viewer to concentrate on the audio-visual nature of the film medium in

contrast to the relentless dialogue that can work to shield the processes and evident in so many films on the conflict. Endless explanatory talking is rejected in favour of an auditory and visual oscillation as the action unfolds, interspersed in the mid-section of the film by a long scene of staged dialogue between the character Sands and a Catholic priest. Whilst there is not always dialogue there is always sound, sound that becomes significant in this way as appropriate to the subject matter, for as David Beresford writes in his account of the Republican hunger strikes, *Ten Men Dead*, sound is important to the prison ecology: ‘Sounds, always sounds. Sounds of fear, sounds of safety’.³⁷ These function in the way that Melvin describes as ‘sonic motifs’.³⁸

If McQueen’s memory is of a television image from 1981 his choice of medium for communicating the context of the prison campaign is, in contrast, radio. We hear the disembodied voices of newsreaders, politicians and, provocatively perhaps, Margaret Thatcher, played over different scenes. By inserting these acoustic-images we are provided with an exposition and, simultaneously, a powerful sense of how the twin tracks of the lived experience of the characters and the political conflict ran in parallel whilst crossing over at these moments. The prison guard listens to the radio whilst driving his car to the prison and, later, a prisoner connects a small radio, smuggled into the prison within the body cavity of a visitor, both to himself as an earpiece and the metal mesh across the window of the prison itself, in a circuit of electromagnetic communication. This use of radio as a medium is not simply about the transmission of a message but draws attention to how acoustical vibrations impact upon the body and activate the senses.³⁹

Throughout the film McQueen constantly plays off one image against another in a series of reflective echoes: the plate of food of the guard/the plate of food for the prisoner; the death of the guard/the death of Sands; dustbin lids beating out a telegraphic message on pavements /batons beaten rhythmically on riot shields; spiritual commitment/spiritual accommodation, silence/talk.

By using radio McQueen is able to avoid the appearance of television news images within the film, something commonly used to ‘evoke’ the period setting of TV drama. This avoidance of tele-visual cliché is a good choice by the artist. Cliché here being defined as the ready-made perception, the habitual, the automatic response McQueen makes a conscious effort to avoid precisely the familiar and shallow morality that usually defines the mainstream news media: he is evading the media machine that endlessly reproduces the habitual recognition without reflection. Recourse by the media to such a force of habit is driven by a

mixture of the practical necessities of news production and the context of wider political failure to resolve the conflict beyond the binaries of identity. For McQueen, the use of the acoustic image works more usefully to initiate a process of moving from the present to the past as an oscillation through the strata of memory.

The use of Margaret Thatcher's voice activates an entire realm of memory as her infamously coached tone manifests the 'quasi-corporeal' power of the sovereign in its intransigence, class hatred and 'affective jingoism'.⁴⁰ There are two uses of recordings of Thatcher's voice in the film. The first is close to the beginning just before the character of Davey Gillen is driven to the Maze in a prison van, the beginning of his incarceration and the end of his civilian existence. The film cuts from the prison officer, who we have tracked through his daily routine, to the toilet block that later becomes the site of brutal treatment of Sands. Empty, apart from the sounds of dripping taps, Thatcher proclaims her uncompromising position and is invested in these images, and we can even hear the intake of her breath as she launches into her carefully crafted speech, replete with its characteristic repetitions and binomials:

There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status.⁴¹

As the voice continues we cut from the washroom to snow falling in the yard against the wall to the silhouette of the trees in a day-for-night shot we will see several times at the end as Sands begins to die. This spectral, disembodied, voice of Thatcher is extra-diegetic; hovering over the film-image it seems to exist in-between the world of the film and the real world, as if in the ether, an uncanny manifestation of history. This background signal can be tuned into via the various apparatus activated by both prisoner and guard.

The use of the radio voice is a carefully chosen one by McQueen to produce an effect that maintains a precise relation to the soundscape of the film for, as Michel Chion argues: 'The presence of a human voice structures the sonic space that contains it'.⁴² The media theorist Friedrich Kittler wrote of how certain voices are 'radiogenic' as 'voices which would become traitors in an optical close-up' and quotes a student of Heidegger who observed of Germany's early radio that 'Death is primarily a radio topic'.⁴³ The lack of the body of the speaking subject is mirrored by the lack of bodies in the frames that the voice moves through: lack drives this

process even if given a materiality to feed upon through the signifier ‘Thatcher’ who functions as what Chion calls the *acousmètre*, as he says: ‘Being in the screen and not, wandering the surface of the screen without entering it, the acousmètre brings disequilibrium and tension’.⁴⁴ For McQueen, it offers a way to reveal the archaeological layers of time or ‘sheets’ as Deleuze describes it.⁴⁵

The *radio-acousmètre* of Thatcher appears again later as a preface to the hunger strike of Sands. Here, the ethereal voice, flat in tone and emotion, plays as the camera floats above the just swept corridor as fractured reflections of the fluorescent strip lighting alternate with gridded windows appear in the streaks of liquid pools before fading to black and the entry into the final third of the film. From this point on we are focussed on the skeletal frame of the actor Michael Fassbender. In the last section of the film as the health of the Sands character declines the sound begins to lose its focus to mimic his loss of hearing.

The speech is actually from after Sands has died (Bobby Sands died 5 May 1981) and broadcast as a BBC Radio News Report 1800 28 May 1981 where she states that:

Faced with the failure of their discredited cause, the men of violence have chosen in recent months to play what may well be their last card. They have turned their violence against themselves through the prison hunger strike to death. They seek to work on the most basic of human emotions – pity – as a means of creating tension and stoking the fires of bitterness and hatred.⁴⁶

The voice of Thatcher has a malevolent quality, due in part, to the fact that it remains disembodied: ‘It’s as if the voice were wandering along the surface, at once inside and outside, seeking a place to settle’.⁴⁷

McQueen’s use of the voice in this way returns us to the criticism made against Clarke that he becomes complicit in the de-historicised nature of media and state framework on the conflict. Thatcher’s voice is left unchallenged within the film as the director composes his range of selective elements positioned to activate various sensory and perceptual registers. However, by letting these inserts and later images of Sands dying hold precisely without dialogue there is the possibility of reflecting more effectively on the *process* of representing these events itself, there is not simply an alternative point of view offered but a critical reflection on how we come to think about what is shown to us.

Conclusion

Both Clarke and McQueen seek to use elements of media news coverage of the conflict in Northern Ireland to creatively evade the limits of its political and discursive framing. By placing an individual practice of repetition at the heart of their artistic strategy they draw attention to the role that the media play in establishing thinking about the conflict through its patterns of memory formation as habitual and unreflective. The shift to creative practices of filmmaking on these heavily mediated events driven by formal experimentation creates potential relays of technique, memory, perception and thinking that, as the political scientist William E. Connolly argues, can produce a synthesis of experience that acts as a spur to consider new ethical and political responses.⁴⁸

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- 26 Friedrich Kittler, 'Gramophone, Film, Typewriter', *October* 41 (1987): 104.
- 27 Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, 'Flesh Becomes Words', *Frieze* 117 (2008), web, <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/flesh_becomes_words/>
- 28 Bob Franklin, *British Television Policy: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001) 180-81.
- 29 David Herbert, 'Shifting securities in Northern Ireland: 'Terror' and 'the Troubles' in global media and local memory', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10:3 (2007): 345.
- 30 See *Time Shift: Speak No Evil: The Story Of The Broadcasting Ban*, BBC, Broadcast date 04/04/2005. Available at: <http://euscreen.eu/play.jsp?id=EUS_BB20EC0127884F6F9E8889178C63AE96>.
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- 32 Aaron Hillis, 'Steve McQueen Touches History in "Hunger"', 19 March 2009, available at: <<http://www.ifc.com/fix/2009/03/steve-mcqueen-on-hunger/2>>.
- 33 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 171.
- 34 Deleuze and Guattari 173.
- 35 Deleuze and Guattari 168.
- 36 Jeff Reichert, 'An Interview with Steve McQueen' *Reverse Shot*, 24 2009, <http://www.reverseshot.com/article/interview_steve_mcqueen>.
- 37 David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* (London: Harper Collins, 1987) 79.
- 38 See Adam Melvin, 'Sonic Motifs, Structure and Identity in Steve McQueen's *Hunger*' *The Soundtrack* 4.1 (2011): 23-32.

- 39 This has been discussed usefully in relation to Beckett and radio, see Brynhildur Boyce, 'The Radio Life and Work of Samuel Beckett', *Nordic Irish Studies* 8.1 (2009): 47-65.
- 40 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 21.
- 41 Margaret Thatcher, <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104589>>.
- 42 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 5.
- 43 Kittler 103.
- 44 Chion 24.
- 45 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Athlone Press, 1989) 99.
- 46 Margaret Thatcher, <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104657>>. The choice of phrase 'the last card' also later provides the title for a BBC Panorama programme broadcast on 21 September 1981 *The Provos Last Card?* from which the iconic images of the dirty protest from UTV were replayed along with clip of TV footage of Thatcher's speech. The programme was a detailed discussion of the context of the hunger strikes and the possible effect on the conflict and is available on the Region 1 (North America) Criterion edition of the DVD acting as a point of supplementarity to the film itself.
- 47 Chion 23.
- 48 See William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).