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'Human Unhumans'. Ageing, Dying and the Body Nostalgic in Kazuo Ishiguro and Hanif Kureishi

Abstract

In one of his *Treatises on Government*, John Locke stated that «every Man has a Property in his own Person»[1]. The complex articulation of this apparently matter-of-fact argument has haunted the Western cultural imaginary, and has been transformed into numerous literary texts and figures. Ever since Mary Shelley started investigating an ante-litteram Foucauldian «unfolding»[2] of life, the issues related to the «immortalization of the flesh and the amortization of the body»[3] have become growingly relevant. In this paper, I shall aim at investigating the literary versions of the biopolitics of owning and disowning bodies, of ageing and dying offered by Kazuo Ishiguro, namely in his celebrated *Never Let Me Go*, and by Hanif Kureishi, who dedicated his novella "The Body" to an interrogation of the marketable value of human bodies and body parts.

… death is not an instantaneous, momentary phenomenon,
but a very protracted process.
Friedrich Engels, *Socialism:*

Utopian and Scientific, 1880

1 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, 2, 27, p. 287.
2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume one: an Introduction*, Pantheon, New York, 1990, p. 138.
3 See Brett Neilson, *Ageing, Experience, Biopolitics: Life's Unfolding*, in "Body & Society", 18, 3-4, 2012, pp. 44-71.

1. Whose Body Is It, Anyway?

In a book on the apotheosis of what he terms «the modern body», Ed Cohen archaeologically reconstructs a history of personhood whose inception could be summarized by John Locke's assured contention that «every Man has a Property in his own Person»[4]. Cohen maintains that this proprietary view was first legally enacted in 1679, with the passing of the *Habeas Corpus Act*, and that Thomas Hobbes can be deemed the loudest advocate on behalf of the natural right of defending one's "natural" immunity[5]. This defense metaphor, which has been dominant approximately for the last two centuries, entails individual and collective armed attacks against a variety of exogenous and endogenous dangerous forces. Truly and obviously enough, technological innovations and implementations have always forced humans to reconsider and rethink their limits, to the point that it is difficult not to agree with Sarah S. Jain when she recalls Freud's statement: «Man [sic] has… become a prosthetic god»[6]. Yet, what appears undeniable is also the fact that the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed, rather than an unaccustomed necessity for coping with innovative technological tools, a dramatic and often confusing 'acceleration' of revolutionary practices – and policies, or lack of them — offering unforeseen possibilities and difficulties alike.

Research on the topics related to embodiment is being carried out from a number of different perspectives, with the hard and cultural sciences often weaving together highly articulate webs and practices.

[4] John Locke, *Two Treatises* cit., p. 287.
[5] See Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending. Immunity, Biopolitics and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2009.
[6] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton, New York, 1962, p. 42, in Sarah S. Jain, *The Prosthetic Imagination: Enabling and Disabling the Prosthetic Trope*, in "Science, Technology and Human Values", 24, 1, 1999, p. 31.

Even a mere listing of such variety is far too ambitious a project for the scope of this paper: I simply intend to restrict my observations to some of the views offered by post-Foucauldian biopolitical discourse in its relation with critical disability studies and their attention to procedures for regulating and normating bodies[7]. With this objective in mind, I shall suggest a reading of Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel, *Never Let Me Go*[8], and of Hanif Kureishi's 2002 novella "The Body"[9]; I argue that both texts investigate — although from opposite points of view — a "new politics of life". Nikolas Rose has pointedly remarked that the latter is «concerned with our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape, and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures»[10]. I shall work on texts which nostalgically attempt at accommodating ever-shifting forms of perception and figuration of ageing, death and biocapital.

2. Shared Ecologies, Molecular Relationality

According to Donna Haraway: «even the most reliable Western individuated bodies… neither stop nor start at the skin»[11]. In this philosopher's view, those who still suppose the possibility of undiscussed "individuation", a cultural remainder/reminder of the putative self-identity and unity of the body, should rather engage with the notion that «far from being a fairly standardized and self-contained

[7] For deep insights into this crucial area of research, see Lennard Davies (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, Routledge, New York and London, 1997 (4th edition 2013); Lennard Davies, *The End of Normal. Identity in a Biocultural Era,* University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2013; Dan Goodley, *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, Sage, London, 2010.
[8] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Random House, London, 2005.
[9] Hanif Kureishi, *The Body: A Novel,* Faber, London, 2002.
[10] See Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006, p. 3.
[11] Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science,* Routledge, New York, 1989, p. 18.

entity, [the body] is highly plastic and rich in the possibilities of intercorporeality»[12]. In place of a stable entity, imagined as a self-contained and immediately, conclusively perceivable organism subjected to all sorts of forays, the body — human, but not only — is being reconceived as a complex web of relations and traffics always in a state of precarious — yet not necessarily unfruitful — balance[13]. Furthermore, the discovery of the unique DNA markers in each cell and the following supposed irreplaceability of each individual have recently receded towards a more unstable background, granted that:

> … our bodies swarm with putatively alien others from the countless bacteria that inhabit our guts … through the incorporation of donated organs that retain their own DNA signature in situ (though even that locational fixity is uncertain), to the "cell-trafficking" that occurs between foetal and maternal bodies and which, against conventional immunological expectations, can persist many years post pregnancy[14].

Shildrick's positions seem to me to be on a par with Butler's recent work on precarity, which obviously calls attention to a more openly geopolitical dimension related to the crossing of boundaries and to global ethical obligations; yet, I wish to suggest that it could also profitably illuminate some of the most complex issues related to the intersections between commodified human capital, value, expenditure and waste I see at work in Ishiguro's and Kureishi's texts. Ed Cohen could again be mentioned in this context, due to his suggestion that «the immune system might be more happily reconfigured as a commune system, recognizing the more "co-constitutive dynamics of

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[12] Margrit Shildrick, *Some Reflections on the Socio-cultural and Bioscientific Limits of Bodily Integrity*, in "Body & Society", 16, 3, 2010, p. 11.
[13] See Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives: the Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Verso, London, 2004, but also Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Picador, London, 2007.
[14] Margrit Shildrick, cit., pp. 16-17.

living"»[15]. This call to communality can generate an awareness of questions which tie together proximity and distance, the macro-level and the micro- if not nano-level of relationality which these scholars, and Butler in her different vein, see as constitutive of contemporary subjectivities. I also believe that it is more fruitful and ethically cogent to accept precarity as our shared ecology, although we must never underestimate the fact that asymmetries in agency and in access to resources is a global plight which ought to be eliminated.

3. Grafting, Gifting, Dys-appearing

Before heading towards Kureishi's and Ishiguro's texts, I want to approach the topics of transplants, tissue engineering and other forms of complex — at times "literally" prosthetic — embodiment which can elucidate the relational precarity I just referred to. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is «invisible»,[16] in the sense that it is generally taken for granted, used and abused, a frame of reference rather than an object of attention. Drew Leder similarly states that only when the body changes, or on the occasions in which its functioning is "interrupted", does it leave its habitual «absent» state in favour of what he defines «dys-appearance»[17]. In the interplay between visibility and invisibility, or, to adopt a less figuratively resounding language, in the

[15] Ed Cohen, cit., p. 281, quoted in Lisa Blackman, *Bodily Integrity*, in "Body & Society", 16, 1, 2010, p. 4.
[16] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible, suivi de notes de travail,* edited by Claude Lefort, Gallimard, Paris, 1964 (Eng. Trans., 1968).
[17] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p. 92 *et passim*. The relation of this text to cultural disability studies is made clear by Margrit Shildrick, although Leder seems to be unaware that he is using the prefix 'dys' with no mention to embodied disability. Rather intriguingly, Leder's contention resonate with Bill Brown's "thing theory", which also suggests that 'matter' becomes visible when its functioning is interrupted. See Bill Brown (ed.), *Thing Theory*, in "Critical Inquiry", 8, 1, 2001, pp. 1-22.

vivid enactment of the body as «site of contestation»[18] which can be found in contemporary biomedicine and bioengineering procedures, evidently lie enormous, and vested, interests.

Transplants have become part of an increasingly ordinary "habitus", at least in the areas and classes where welfare systems or, with constantly growing frequency, individual investments permit them. Interestingly enough, Butler herself founds the main argument of her *Precarious Lives* on the two pivotal poles of proximity and distance, whereby the Other is never just "here", nor "there", while their plight is registered in several elsewheres which demand ethical attention and reciprocity[19].

What happens when we approach the topics of incarnated embodiment by adopting the same vocabulary and methodological grids? Are we left with the "defense" metaphor whose historical relevance and hold Cohen has so lucidly pointed out? Can we read through the scientific and cultural questions and questionings of transplants or other forms of bio-modification to find other forms of "intimacy" and molecular relationality? I suggest we may and must. The aggression/response binary is not, at least, no longer, a feasible instrument. It might be more challenging as well as rewarding to move to the theorizations on tissue economies carried out by Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell[20]. These two scholars maintain that human tissue is being transformed into a saleable commodity, through mechanisms which differentiate between raw material and a sort of surplus value they define «biovalue»[21]; stem cell trafficking is indeed on this agenda, as we shall see, as much as organ transplant economies

[18] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994, p. 19.
[19] See Judith Butler, cit., p. 40 *et passim*.
[20] See Catherine Waldby, Robert Mitchell, *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006.
[21] *Ivi*, p. 32 *et passim*.

which are based on and dramatically, "programmatically", reproduce class, gender, racial injustice to an intolerable extent.

And yet, to complicate things further, «…despite biomedicine increasingly approaching the body as a collection of "detachable things" (blood, organs, bone marrow, sperm, ova, hands, faces, etc.), "human tissues are not impersonal"»[22]. The word by which transplants were originally metaphorically imagined was the term "graft", which seems once again to presuppose a steady and stable living unit onto which "supplements" can be added and replaced. This version of transplant discourse is being substituted by the differently relevant metaphor by which organs are "donated", or "gifted". In the beautiful pages he dedicates to the aftermath of his own heart transplant, Jean-Luc Nancy writes about the difference he physically discovers between the two semantic fields; he also powerfully meditates on «life proper»[23] and on the lessons taught him by "his" heart dys-appearing and becoming intrusive «through its defection – almost through rejection, if not dejection»[24]. Very intriguingly, rather than merely celebrating the possibilities of survival offered by a successful transplant, he confronts with the double bind in which he feels caught. To him, «… organ transplant imposes the image of a passage through nothingness, of an entry into a space emptied of all property, all intimacy… or the image of this space intruding in me…»[25]. But also, when asking himself about the ethical reasonings and selections due to which "one" life over many others is "saved" by a donation, Nancy states all but simply that a «life proper… resides in no one organ» but «without them [it] is nothing»[26].

What and how is life in an "alien" body? But also, what does it feel not to own one's body, nor the discrete "units" it is allegedly composed

[22] *Ivi*, quoted in Lisa Blackman, "Bodily Integrity", cit., p. 4.
[23] Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Intrus* (translated by Susan Hanson), in "The New Centennial Review", 2, 3, 2002, p. 7.
[24] *Ivi*, p. 3.
[25] *Ivi*, p. 8.
[26] *Ibidem*.

of? My case rests on these two interrogatives and on an attempt at working through literary texts which articulate the agonizing contradictions I have been setting down. To sum up, I agree with Lisa Blackman when she convincingly contends that «the singular, bounded, carbon-based body is being replaced by the proliferation and emergence of technologies and practices which enable the enhancement, alteration and invention of new bodies»[27]. What follows is an attempt at conveying a sense that the "new politics of life" forcefully impinges on human beings and raises radical questions on global ethics and on the painful asymmetricality of ethical relations contemporary fiction often depicts. In the cases of both Ishiguro and Kureishi, this very asymmetricality seems to me to be predicated on the slippery presence, in every discourse on "newness" and empowering "enhancement", of nostalgic traces of impairment, ageing and dying.

4. Clone-nial Extrusions, Colonial Intrusions[28]

Clonation lies at the shadowy background of Ishiguro's last novel to date. On the other hand, donation is repeatedly referred to in this novel, which, quite surprisingly, in its author's view is his «most cheerful to date»[29]; to me, *Never Let Me Go* is tinged with somber, melancholy tones which offer no escape.

> … I wanted to write a book about how people accept that we are mortal… I wanted the characters in *Never Let Me Go* to react to this horrible programme they seem to be subjected to in much the way in which we accept the human condition… ageing, and falling to bits, and dying[30].

[27] Lisa Blackman, *The Body. Key Concepts*, Berg, Oxford, 2008, p. 3.
[28] I owe this beautiful coining to Robbie B. H. Goh, *The postclone-nial in Kazuo Ishiguro's* Never Let Me Go *and Amitav Ghosh's* The Calcutta Chromosome*: Science and the Body in the Asian Diaspora*, in "ARIEL", 41, 3-4, 2010, pp. 45-71.
[29] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Future imperfect*, in "The Guardian", Saturday 25 March 2006.
[30] Sean Matthews, *I'm Sorry I Can't Say More: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro*, in Sean Matthews and Sebastian Groes (eds.), *Kazuo Ishiguro. Contemporary Critical*

The novel is a first-person narration of the lives of three young ex fellow students of Hailsham, a fictitious boarding school set in the middle of a perfectly English countryside, where a group of "special" children are educated in the arts. Kathy H., the narrator, also takes the responsibility of relating Ruth's and Tommy's unfolding of life.

> My name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old, and I've been a carer now for over eleven years. That sounds long enough, I know, but actually they want me to go on for another eight months, until the end of this year. That'll make it almost exactly twelve years. Now I know my being a carer so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. … But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as "agitated", even before fourth donation[31].

Formally constituted as a traditional coming-of-age narrative, since its first page *Never Let Me Go* plunges the reader deep into an intimate relation with Kathy. Her memoir, as Silvia Caporale Bizzini suggests adapting Paul Eakin's insight on «relational autobiography»[32], functions as a binding place, a given testimony of an apparently ordinary, tacitly left unquestioned system of clone production set in an imaginary England of a very recent past. Kathy H. presents herself not as a clone, nor as a donor-to-be, but as a carer, whose success in keeping "her" donors unagitated has prolonged not only her career,

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Perspectives, Continuum, London and New York, 2009, pp. 114-25, p. 124, quoted in Silvia Caporale Bizzini, *Recollecting Memories, Reconstructing Identities: Narrators as Storytellers in Kazuo Ishiguro's* When We Were Orphans *and* Never Let Me Go, in "ATLANTIS. Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies", 35, 2, 2013, p. 75.

[31] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, cit., p. 6.

[32] Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Became Stories. Making Selves*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1999, p. 85, quoted in Silvia Caporale Bizzini, *Recollecting Memories*, cit., p. 75.

but her own life. The sense of impending mortality which inaugurates the narration/novel never "lets go", and her collective memoir could also well function as an instance of a «some body memoir»[33]. Thomas Couser has thus referred to the recent boom in nobody memoirs, autobiographies of the "un-famous", which in his view are often characterized by focusing on «what it's like to *have* or to *be,* to live in or *as*, a particular body – indeed a body that is often odd or anomalous»[34]. Kathy H., Ruth, Tommy and all the other young characters in the novel are clones, and since their childhood they know they are destined to donate every possible part of their bodies and, eventually, «complete». Death is therefore identified with the completion of this unusual *Bildungsroman*, with closure, with a conclusive successful obliteration of fruitful "oddity".

Yet, this is also a novel on friendship and love, on adolescent dreaming and a poignant, painful longing for a family. Ruth relates their journey to Norfolk — the imaginative treasure chest where in the text all stories and lost things eventually arrive —, where Ruth's «*possible*»[35] genetic "matrix" has allegedly been spotted. Finding biological and metaphorical "parents" is as relevant in the novel as accepting one's predestined future: indeed, as a pathography, *Never Let Me Go* uncannily involves the reader in an affective reenactment of the «living on/borderlines» Jacques Derrida was working on at the time/on the occasion of his death.

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[33] G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies. Disability in Contemporary Life Writing*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2009, p. 2.
[34] *Ibidem*.
[35] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, cit., p. 115. In Mark Jerng's view: «The possible is not looked at as a point of origin or parent who imposes a prefabricated vision on the clone, but as a point of sameness who helps the clone negotiate who she is». Mark Jerng, *Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human*, in "Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas", 6, 2, 2008, p. 387.

Long before the experience of survival that I am presently facing, I wrote that survival is an original concept which constitutes the very structure of what we call existence. We are, structurally speaking, survivors, marked by this structure of the trace, of the testament. That said, I would not endorse the view according to which survival is more on the side of death and the past than of life and the future[36].

Seen from this perspective, *Never Let Me Go* is indeed comparable to a traditional *ars bene moriendi.* Derrida expands on this theme, and on the crucial relation between *bene moriendi* and *bene vivendi* strategies and tactics, when he affirms: «No, I never learned to live. Definitely not! Learning to live should mean learning to die. I never learned to accept death. I remain impervious to being educated in the wisdom of knowing how to die»[37]. Ishiguro's clone characters are instead compliant and learn with exact, lucid precision that death is, as Engels states in the epigraph to this essay, a «very protracted process»[38].

Eventually coming together, but only after Tommy has started his journey of donation, Ruth and Tommy track one of the guardians in charge of Hailsham, the mysterious Madame, in the illusory hope that she might help them delay their completion. It is only in the very last pages that Ishiguro clearly unveils the nature of the "gift economy" represented by his fictitious clonation/donation predicament:

… when the great breakthroughs in science followed one after the other so rapidly, there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions. Suddenly there were all these new possibilities laid before us, all these ways to cure so many previously

[36] See Jacques Derrida, *Survivre. Journal de bord*, in *Parages*, Galilée, Paris, 1986, translated by James Hulbert, *Living On/Border Lines*, in Harold Bloom et al. (eds.)*, Deconstructionism and Criticism*, Continuum, New York, 1979, pp. 75-176. The quotation is from Jacques Derrida, *The Last Interview*, Robert Knafo (trans. and ed.), Studio Visit, New York, 2004, no page number available.
[37] Jacques Derrida, *The Last Interview*, cit., no page number available.
[38] Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume 3, pp. 95-151; Progress Publishers, 1970, p. 47, original edition in French, in "Revue Socialiste"*,* March, April, and May 1880.

incurable conditions. This is what the world noticed the most, wanted the most. And for a long time, people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere ... by the time they came to consider just how you were reared, whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it s was too late. There was no way to reverse the process. How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? . . . So for a long time you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn't matter[39].

Systematic genocide is indeed at stake, although hidden under the veil of a semi-sacrificial economy allowing only "some" never to let go their hold on life by reducing "others" to what Giorgio Agamben defined as «bare life»[40]. As Mark Jerng has made clear, these «human unhumans»[41] disrupt

… the narrative of individuation and the values placed on the mysteriousness of birth, the "giftedness" of life, and wholeness. The novel takes up the question that challenges our privileged narratives of humanness: how is a life that is not "born" in the usual sense given form and dignity?[42]

The claim on life, individuality and narrative that Kathy H. advances in *Never Let Me Go* recalls Nancy's stimulating remarks on the status of the gift/donation:

… no one can doubt that this gift has become an elementary obligation of humanity (in the two senses of the word); nor can one doubt that it institutes among us, without any limit other than the incompatibility of blood type (and, in particular, without the limits of sex or ethnicity: my heart may be the heart of a

[39] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, cit., pp. 262-63.
[40] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*, Einaudi, Torino, 1995, translated into English as *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998.
[41] Hanif Kureishi, cit., p. 120.
[42] Mark Jerng, cit., pp. 382-3.

black woman), the possibility of a network wherein life/death is shared out, where life connects with death, where the incommunicable communicates[43].

The network the French philosopher is haunted by requires the acceptance of a responsible human co-entanglement. This takes place in Ishiguro's work, in which young humans, healthy bodies are rendered perfectly «docile»[44], educated to experience multiple impairments and the pain of live "extrusion". Hanif Kureishi's "The Body", instead, relates another version of «falling to bits», an opposing sense of the expression "coming of age"; again, the story is told in the first person, the narratorial voice being that of a successful writer whose main, if not unique, interest, lies in the state of his body.

> Want to hear about my health? I don't feel particularly ill, but I am in my mid-sixties; my bed is my boat across these final years. My knees and back give me a lot of pain. I have hemorrhoids, an ulcer, and cataracts. When I eat, it's not unusual for me to spit out bits of tooth as I go. My ears seem to lose focus as the day goes on and people have to yell into me. I don't go to parties because I don't like to stand up. If I sit down, it makes it difficult for others to speak to me. Not that I am always interested in what they have to say; and if I am bored, I don't want to hang around, which might make me seem abrupt or arrogant[45].

In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, the Western culture has always considered old age as «a kind of shameful secret that is unseemly to mention»[46]. In this text, on the contrary, old age is initially portrayed not as "incommunicable", but as aesthetically unbearable, as a state of exception to a given rule by which beauty, energy and tonicity have become generalized mandates. Offered the chance of acting against the ineluctability of old age, and death, which always

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[43] Jean-Luc Nancy, cit., p. 8.
[44] The obvious reference is to Michel Foucault, "The Docile Body", in *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, Random House, New York, 1975.
[45] Hanif Kureishi, cit., p. 2.
[46] Simone De Beauvoir, *La vieillesse*, 1972, *The Coming of Age*, Patrick O'Brian trans., Norton & Co., New York and London, 1996, p. 1.

remains present even if apparently forever warded off, the appropriately named Adam decides in favour of trading «his half-dead carcass» and getting «something new»[47]. An unspecified, mysterious and costly operation transforms Adam into a doubly uncanny body: his chosen body is simultaneously an alien, an intruder, who is also intruded upon by Adam's brain. Kureishi thus successfully stages the double bind of Nancy's «extrusion»[48].

5. Trafficking (with) Time, Figuring Age

Annette Büler-Dietrich dedicates interesting pages to the presence/absence of technological details and information in Kureishi's novella. What she deems remarkable in the text is the fact that biotechnologies and the ethical questions they (ought to) raise are seen from a peripheral perspective, as though they were not exactly the point the text is trying to make. Indeed, the somatic and narratorial self the novella posits is in a state of continuous imbalance, its hybridity tainted — only metaphorically, since, surprisingly for Kureishi, any clear reference to skin colour is absent — and literally marked by its "receiving" body:

> Stocky and as classically handsome as any sculpture in the British Museum, he was neither white nor dark, but lightly toasted, with a fine, thick penis and heavy balls. I would, at last, have the body of an Italian footballer: an aggressive, attacking midfielder, say[49].

Adam's plight is the plight of artificial and yet entirely natural flesh, of a body compared to the beauty of classical statuary but also identified with a stereotypical image of embodied, bellicose

[47] Hanif Kureishi, cit., p. 1.
[48] «… this very strangeness refers me back to myself: "I" am because I am ill… henceforth intruding [my heart], it must be extruded. » Jean-Luc Nancy, cit., p. 4.
[49] Hanif Kureishi, cit., p. 25.

masculinity. The obsessive desire for irresponsible youth, for the possibility of an allegedly never-ending hyper-sexuality, for inconsequential actions, moves Adam towards choosing his new "self" and "future". Yet, he truly becomes a «non synchronous monster of the biotechnological age»[50]. To recall Nancy, again:

> It is thus my self who becomes my own intrus in all these combined and opposing ways. I feel it distinctly; it is much stronger than a sensation: never has the strangeness of my own identity, which I've nonetheless always found so striking, touched me with such acuity. "I" has clearly become the formal index of an unverifiable and impalpable system of linkages. Between my self and me there has always been a gap of space-time: but now there is the opening of an incision and an immune system that is at odds with itself, forever at cross purposes, irreconcilable[51].

That gap is continuously noted by Adam, who realizes that by trading, exchanging, conquering and relinquishing bodies, the new super-race — and, quite openly, "class" — of superbodies «were making a society in which everyone would be the same age»[52]. Chosen from within never ending rows of corpses, the body Adam stitches onto is indeed a thing, a commodity; and yet, as the narrator relates in his sexual dreams, every body, especially the mutant Newbody he has become, are continuously on the verge of being turned into «meat, held down, tied, blindfolded, slapped, pulled and strangled»[53]. Quite revealingly, as in the case of Ishiguro's novel, even in Kureishi's work «… the young and handsome bodies of the detritus of society are commodified and reused»[54]. To make this view plain, the body in the

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[50] Annette Büler-Dietrich, "Technologies in Hanif Kureishi's 'The Body'", in Walter Goebel, Saskia Schabio (eds.), *Beyond the Black Atlantic. Relocating Modernization and Technology*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, pp 168-183, p. 168.
[51] Jean-Luc Nancy, cit., p. 10.
[52] Hanif Kureishi, cit., p. 37.
[53] *Ivi*, p. 58.
[54] *Ivi*, p. 169.

novella and in Ishiguro's novel is a malleable facility, an object lost in the endless mazes of global capital: its signatures trace it forever back to social marginalization, exploitation and inevitable – at times longed for — death. Eventually, the creases on the female protagonists' bodies are nostalgically caressed as sign of consistency, and the return to the initial/conclusive body the text had started with and against is posited by Kureishi as the only logical, ethical outcome, which will nevertheless eventually be impeded by the more powerful demands of the global market.

6. Prosthetic Imaginings, Supplementary Things

«I think objects, as prosthetics or as extensors and "hypomnematas" … have been a central part of hominization from the beginning, that is, as both products and triggers of alloplastic evolution»[55]: thus begins Couze Venn's study on the relation between individuation and affect, between things, animals and humans. In another key, Margrit Shildrick also proposes important reflections on the intriguing nature of prosthetics, by which she refers, although not inattentively, to organ transplantation and to more conventional "exterior" prostheses. She remarks that «whatever the context, the body — my human body — is never self-complete and bounded against otherness, but is irreducibly caught up in a web of constitutive connections that disturb the very idea of human being»[56]. I wish to suggest, again, that Kureishi's and Ishiguro's texts also tackle the topic of prosthetic imaginings and deal with transitional objects of various types: they are eventually focused not only on human relations, but also on an in-depth meditation on matter and "non-human" objects.

[55] Couze Venn, *Individuation, Relationality, Affect: Rethinking the Human in Relation to the Living*, in "Body & Society", 16, 1, 2010, p. 131.
[56] Margrit Shildrick, cit., p. 13.

Via Shildrick, I am once more fascinated by Derrida's intervention in the discourse on "supplementarity":

> As Derrida makes clear throughout his work, supplementarity is always paradoxical in that it implies a movement both to enhance — even complete — a prior object, and at the same time to substitute or stand in the place of that object. As Kamuf remarks, a supplement is "at once something secondary, external, and compensatory, and something that substitutes, violates and usurps"[57].

I suggest that both Kureishi's "resurrected" corpses and Ishiguro's manipulated ones function as unconventional "supplements": in both cases they are described as social detritus, as material rubble which must be "accommodated". Kureishi bitterly portrays bodies "colonized" by matter and materiality, offered to consumption with such abundance and indifference that they eventually surfeit. In the case of *Never Let Me Go*, things inhabit the narrative space in a different, more nostalgic and affectively relevant sense, in the collections the children at Hailsham obsessively invest their energies on and protect, in the old-fashioned tape which can reproduce the fictitious late-fifties song the title refers to, in the waste material flapping around Norfolk in the concluding pages of the novel.

7. Politics of Care, 'Donner la mort'

Arne De Boever, Bruce Robbins and Anne Whitehead all select *Never Let Me Go* to investigate both contemporary governmental policies of care and a more affective investment in the body, be it in health or illness[58]. I want to add to this discussion some of the remarkable

[57] Peggy Kamuf, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991, p. 139, n. 9, quoted in Margrit Shildrick, cit., p. 16.
[58] Arne De Boever, *Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel,* Bloomsbury, New York and London, 2013; Bruce Robbins, *Cruelty Is Bad: Banality and Proximity in* Never Let Me Go, in "NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction", Special Issue on Ishiguro's Unknown Communities, 40, 3, 2007, pp. 289-302; Anne Whitehead, *Writing with*

arguments put to the fore by Brett Neilson, who contends that, while apparently preoccupied with their citizens' health and well-being, modern governments invest on tissue trafficking, on human matter at its molecular level, while they are massively disinvesting in human individuals, cutting on welfare systems and on pensions alike. Neilson describes the first attitude as «immortalization of the flesh», whereas the second, painfully visible, policy-making ideology is described as the «amortization of the body»[59]. While it is becoming clear that nowadays no human waste is really unprofitable, with human genetic material of all sorts and origins flooding and filtering through legal and illegal markets alike, it is also sadly clear that disinvestment in actual humans, — relational, incomplete, precarious, yet "actual" —, calls our attention and provokes harsh worldwide debates. Kathy H.'s initial words concerning her life as carer strike as particularly meaningful: «… the work gets a lot harder when you don't have that deeper link with the donor, and though I'll miss being a carer, it feels just about right to be finishing at last come the end of the year»[60].

According to Matthew Eatough, not only is Kathy's body perfectly domesticated and docilely rendered keen to please and obey the mysterious «they» she mentions in her memoir; more relevantly to an analysis of the politics of care, she works to tame her donors, and, by keeping them placid, transforms care into a politics of domination.

Kathy's work as a "carer" makes possible the social legibility and effectiveness of affective states – their ability to be recognized as common collective possessions, if you will – by conditioning individual affect into a state of indifference to the body. The few asides that Kathy makes about her work indicate that her main occupation

Care: Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go, in "Contemporary Literature", 52, 1, 2011, pp. 54-83.

[59] Brett Neilson, cit., p. 46.

[60] Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, cit., p. 7.

consists in regulating the negative feelings that trouble donors and transforming them into malleable indifference[61].

Seen from a different angle, Ishiguro leaves it to his readers to meditate, comment and maybe act upon his novel; yet, he donates Kathy a responsibility and an honour, that of also caring for personal and collective memory, of cherishing its "survival", even if it might superficially appear exclusively non original, clone-nial. In *The Gift of Death*, as well as in the earlier *Demeure*, Derrida relates one's apprehension of death with the perception of one's individuality, of one's irreplaceability as a witness (taken to the extreme, of one's own death); his words could well be spoken by this fictive and doomed narrator: «I am the only one to have seen this unique thing, the only one to have heard or to have been put in the presence of this or that, at a determinate, indivisible instant; and … you must believe me because I am irreplaceable»[62].

In Kureishi's text, the trace of non originality is also quite visible, a "literal" mark (the owner of Adam's body was aptly called Mark) on the head of Newbodies which testifies to a successful adaptation[63]. Behind scars and unreadable personal histories written on "that other" body, also lies an affective memory — in the sense Brian Massumi suggested: «It's as if I have a ghost, or shadow-soul inside me. I can feel things, perhaps memories, of the man who was here first»[64]. That ghost, the intruder, is not only the trace of complex embodiments, but the narration itself; both *Never Let Me Go* and "The Body" seem to me to duplicate and deny, cure and kill, obliterate and re-member,

[61] Matthew Eatough, *The Time that Remains: Organ Donation, Temporal Duration, and Bildung in Kazuo Ishiguro's* Never Let Me Go, in "Literature and Medicine", 29, 1, 2011, p. 147.
[62] Jacques Derrida, *Demeure,* p. 40
[63] Hanif Kureishi, cit., p. 98.
[64] *Ivi*, p. 51.

exposing characters and readers to the utter claims of comatose, if not entirely lethal, nostalgia:

> The intrus exposes me, excessively. It extrudes, it exports, it expropriates: I am the illness and the medical intervention, I am the cancerous cell and the grafted organ, I am the immune-depressive agents and their palliatives, I am the bits of wire that hold together my sternum, I am this injection site permanently stitched in below my clavicle… I am… living-dead…[65]

[65] Jean-Luc Nancy, cit., p. 13.

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