INHUMAN TRANSACTIONS? REPRESENTING THE COMMODIFICATION OF HUMAN BODY PARTS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Shital Pravinchandra Laxmidas

August 2009

© 2009 Shital Pravinchandra Laxmidas

INHUMAN TRANSACTIONS? REPRESENTING THE COMMODIFICATION OF HUMAN BODY PARTS

Shital Pravinchandra Laxmidas, Ph.D.

Cornell University 2009

This dissertation explores the commodification of the human body that emerges from the relationship between late capitalism and biomedical advances in transplant technology. A closer look at the circuits of organ trade shows that the trafficking of human organs perpetuates the structures of economic exploitation that characterised colonialism in its heyday: organs travel from formerly colonized nations to former metropoles, from black/brown bodies to white ones, from poor to rich. In the wake of biotechnology, I argue, the commodification of the human body is taking on new, predatory forms that can only be understood in the context of (de)colonization, globalization and late capitalism.

I begin by examining organ commodification in relation to Karl Marx's theorisation of the commodification of labour-power, and then proceed to examine organ harvesting, transplanting and trafficking as represented in three contemporary texts: Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest* (1996), Stephen Frears's film *Dirty Pretty Things* (2003) and Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005). These texts grapple with contemporary debates around organ harvesting and stage the new ethical dilemmas to which the use and abuse of transplant technologies gives rise. They engage with this newly materialised way of commoditising the body in a way that allows us to think about organ exchange, not as a transaction forever trapped between the dynamic of altruistic donation and commoditised exchange, but as a site from which to examine the fraught relationship that exists between organ donors/sellers and organ receivers/buyers.

A comparison of all three works reveals the need to understand transplant technologies and the commoditization of the human body that they permit as inextricable from the empowering yet disturbingly predatory effects that biotechnologies have on our understanding of death, where death is increasingly imagined as a fate that technology can endlessly keep at bay. Drawing attention to themselves as literary works, these texts dare to imagine and interrogate the future that biotechnology both promises and threatens us with. In my literary-critical readings, I make a claim for literature's ability to stand as a constant counterpoint to the instrumental logic that characterises organ commodification, signalling instead, to a space beyond such instrumentality.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Shital Pravinchandra dislikes the question "Where are you from?" because she does not know how to answer it. She was the last member of her generation to be born in Mozambique. Unlike her parents and older cousins, who were born in Mozambique during the time it was a Portuguese colony, Shital was born after independence, in the capital city renamed Maputo. Shital's grandparents hail from Gujarat, India's westernmost state. Like many other Gujaratis, they left India for East and Southeast Africa, settling there as traders. In the wake of the civil war that broke out in Mozambique following independence, Shital's family migrated to Europe, choosing, after many detours, to settle in the world's first modern colony: the Canary Islands, Spain. Shital's parents sent her to an international school because they wanted her to learn English. Shital grew up speaking Gujarati at home, English at school and Spanish everywhere else. To a large extent, this division continues to apply.

In 1996, Shital left the Canaries, a place she still considers home and where her parents and other family continue to reside, in order to attend the University of London. She received her B.A in French and Hindi in 2000 and an MA in Comparative Literature, also from the University of London, in 2001.

मेरे माता-पिता के लिये: सब से ज्यादा मैं ने आप से सीखा है

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members Natalie Melas, Biodun Jeyifo, Shelley Feldman and Mary Pat Brady for their seminars and their work, for the enthusiasm and faith with which they backed my project and the care and encouragement with which they read my work.

From my friends in Ithaca I learnt as much as I did from graduate school. I owe a special thank you to them all. Sze Wei Ang and Tsitsi Jaji, my cohort, I thank for their help and support throughout. To Akin Adesokan and Ogaga Ifowodo I give thanks for being ideal neighbours and for making my parents feel so welcome when they visited. Jorge Peña shared his music, his sense of humour and his pragmatism, always making me look forward to a visit to Olin Library at the end of a long day. Cristina Lanzas I thank for her contagious calmness, smile and good taste in wine; Fede Fridman for his conversation and restlessness. I thank Abe Zubarev for his kindness, his concern and for our long conversations, and Katherine Groo for shared moments and for her belief in this project. I am also grateful to Alfredo Sosa-Velasco, first reader of Chapter 4, for his comments, but even more, perhaps, for our shared memories of Alaska y Dinarama and other ‘gems’ from ’80s and ’90s Spain. I am grateful that I met Abhijit Patnaik and Daniel Tonozzi just before I left Ithaca: writing would have been unbearable without their sense of fun and their kindness. Krupa Shandilya I thank for a never ending supply of warmth, friendship, acronyms and chai. For our Sunday brunches, for countless rides in ‘Chupette’ and, above all, for being

my first and unfailing friend in Ithaca I want to thank Nathalie Nicod. Last, but hardly least, I thank Stanka Radovic, for unconditional friendship and hospitality.

I am grateful to Mary Pat for hosting and leading our dissertation group meetings and to all its members for sharing their work with me, and taking the time to read mine so carefully. Part of this project took shape during a semester spent at Berkeley. I want to thank Rakesh Bhandari, Karl Britto, Lawrence Cohen and Michael Rubenstein for taking the time to discuss their ideas with me; Usha Jain for her fantastic Hindi classes and Scott Schlossberg for sharing notes, tips about where to find the best coffee and plenty of good times.

From my very first day in Ithaca, Sue Besemer touched me with her kindness; I thank her for her readiness to provide a word of encouragement, a ride or help with getting hold of an elusive signature. Tomás Beviá in Romance Studies was an inspiring course leader, and I want to thank him for trusting his teaching assistants, for his advice and for his infectious enthusiasm. I am grateful also to Stephen Donatelli for observing my seminars, for his feedback and for his commitment to teaching writing. Thanks to Sujata Singh for choosing me to be her Hindi assistant and for her constant encouragement in my Hindi classes. I thank Masha Raskolnikov who, by taking an interest in my project and providing such encouragement, far exceeded her duties as Placement Officer. Thanks also to all my students in Cornell for their questions, their honesty and, ultimately, for teaching me so much.

Writing would have proved impossibly solitary without Ila, Pravin, Anand, Andrea and Phil who were with me even when it came to distances. I thank them for

their patience, their phone calls, their much awaited visits, their tales from home and, in dedicating this thesis to them, for more than I can say.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH		iii
DEDICATION		iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		v
TABLE OF CONTENTS		viii
INTRODUCTION	*The Biotechnological Revolution and Organ Transplantation*	1
CHAPTER 1	*Special Commodities: Nature, Labour-Power and the Live Human Organ*	27
CHAPTER 2	*New Technologies and Dangerous Fantasies: Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest*	53
CHAPTER 3	*Hospitality for Sale, or Dirty PrettyThings*	80
CHAPTER 4	*Undeferrable Donations: Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go*	110
CONCLUSION	*Imagining the Future*	144
BIBLIOGRAPHY		164

Introduction

THE BIOTECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION AND ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION

[T]he attempt to [...] save human affairs from their frailty by dealing with them as though they were or could become the planned products of human making has first of all resulted in channelling the human capacity for action, for beginning new and spontaneous processes which without men would never come into existence, into an attitude towards nature which up to the latest stage of the modern age had been one of exploring natural laws and fabricating objects out of natural material. [Now] [...] we have begun to act into nature [...] This started harmlessly enough with the experiment in which men were no longer content to observe, to register, and contemplate whatever nature was willing to yield in her own appearance, but began to prescribe conditions and to provoke natural processes. [...] [It] has finally ended in a veritable act of 'making' nature, that is, of creating 'natural' processes which without men would never exist and which earthly nature by herself seems incapable of accomplishing...

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

I Confounding Promises

It was 1958, after the world had witnessed the first use of nuclear weapons, when Hannah Arendt urged us, in the pages of *The Human Condition*, to ask ourselves where the ethical, legal and ontological limits of scientific and medical progress should lie. Today, in the age of cloning, genetic modification of organisms, organ transplantation, new reproductive technologies and human genome mapping, this question is equally pressing. Our medical technologies are ripe with paradoxical possibilities that, on the one hand, invite us to marvel at its achievements and to hope for still more dazzling cures.[1] On the other hand, we may recoil from the hubristic overtones of medicine's promises, and fear the consequences of a looming society in which the naturally given is increasingly replaceable by the artificially engineered.

[1] Taking my cue from Nikolas Rose, I want to qualify my use, throughout this section, of the first person plural, which deceptively implies universality. "Our" medical technologies are hardly distributed evenly. Rose cites a Médicins Sans Frontières document reporting that a mere 10 percent of the US's total spending on health research is allocated for the treatment of 90 percent of the global disease burden (261, fn1).

Some twenty years after Arendt, in *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault traced the process that landed us in the era of biopolitics, when political authority depends on the technologies of biopower, technologies through which the state aims to manage, know and intervene in the biological lives and capacities of its citizens, thereby "achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (140). If Foucault himself acknowledged that by the nineteenth century, biopower was increasingly exercised outside the state, "in a whole series of sub-State institutes such as medical institutions, welfare funds, insurance and so on," then today's medical technologies, as we shall see shortly, frequently entangle not only the state and sub-State institutions, but the citizen-subject herself in the sticky business of deciding when an intervention in a given individual's life is desirable and/or legitimate (*Society Must be Defended*, 145).

Due perhaps to the dread-suffused wonder they arouse, a vast amount of critical literature has sprung up around biotechnological developments, and a large portion of this work insists on the revolutionary, transformative and novel character of the questions and challenges with which biotechnology confronts us.[2] The term 'biotechnology,' that is, "any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms, or derivatives thereof, to make or modify products or processes for specific use," may have originated in agriculture, but the current definition of the term by the Convention on Biological Diversity reflects the fact that the term now refers to the technological modification of *all* living organisms.[3] While Arendt's still-pertinent

[2] I cite a few examples from the thinkers whose work I find most insightful: Paul Rabinow argues that "[c]ontemporary technical capacities [...] now raise a range of possibilities for *new* practices, and hence *new* meaning, which overflow the older vessels" (148, emphasis added). Nikolas Rose contends that we are faced with the task of making sense of "an *emergent* form of life" (3, emphasis added) and speaks of how biotechnology "*transforms* conceptions of human life" (153, emphasis added). Paul Gilroy repeatedly uses the term "biotechnological revolution," and his argument – which I discuss in more detail below – is heavily informed by "the scientific and technological changes that have followed the *revolution* in molecular biology" (43, emphasis added).
[3] See http://www.cbd.int/convention/articles.shtml?a=cbd-02 Last accessed 31 July 2008.

observations of half a century ago serve as a cautionary reminder not to indulge in a "breathless epochalization" of the twenty-first century as a sort of threshold in biotechnological developments (Rose, 252), it is important to note that biotechnology has made dramatic progress since the 1950s, reaching the stage where the everyday lives of a majority of first-world citizens, at least, are infused by it. It is the increasing ubiquity of biotechnology in day to day life and the extent to which biotechnology and the life sciences have become globally enmeshed in geographical, economic and interpersonal circuits (Rose, 15), that warrants speaking of this as a new phenomenon.[4]

The aim of this project is to interrogate the series of dichotomous pairings that are invariably thrown up in scientific, cultural or bioethical discussions of biotechnology. Biotechnology, it would seem, forces us to choose: between the natural and the artificial, between the gift of life and the sale of life, between dignity and dehumanization, between mortality and immortality. My goal is to analyse the difficult but inescapable choices that appear to await us in our biotechnological futures, choices, I suggest, that are inextricable from both the geo-political configurations of the globe that result from colonization, globalization and late capitalism, and the empowering and disturbingly predatory effects that biotechnologies have on our understanding of life, where life is increasingly seen as a technologically prolongable process.

If the use of biotechnology on us human beings is the source of much controversy, ultimately, the disagreements between the sceptics and the believers can

---

[4] Four of the key areas in which we see the impact of biotechnology in our daily lives, as Nikolas Rose points out, are the following: 1) reproduction and natality, given the advent of prenatal diagnosis and embryo selection; 2) superior performance in sport; 3) ageless bodies, given the wide range of technologies available for increasing the human lifespan, and 4) happy souls, due to the family of SSRI drugs which alter and improve moods (77).

be traced, as Paul Rabinow argues, to the tension that underlies Western conceptions of the body. Sketching a genealogy that takes us back to Christianity and the myth of resurrection, Rabinow shows that there lurks in Western tradition "the still present sense that the body and its parts are always more than things" (146). In contrast, contemporary biotechnology and genetics view the body as something that can be divided "into a potentially discrete, knowable and exploitable reservoir of molecular and biochemical products and events. By reason of its commitment to fragmentation, there is literally no conception of the person as a whole underlying these particular technological practices" (149).

Nikolas Rose's argument develops along similar lines. Clinical medicine as it evolved during the nineteenth century, he explains, saw the body at the "molar level," focusing on it "as a systemic whole" (11). Today's medical gaze however, increasingly visualizes the body at the "molecular level."[5] What molecularization enables, crucially, is the disassociation of certain tissues, molecules and proteins from their particular sources in a specific organ, individual or even species. Molecularization, in other words, allows tissues, cells and other biological material "to be regarded, in many respects, as manipulable and transferrable elements or units, which can be delocalized – moved from place to place, from organism to organism, from disease to disease, from person to person" (15).

Taken together, Rabinow's and Rose's arguments provide the key to understanding the high level of interest that scholars of society and culture are currently showing in the life sciences. As Priscilla Wald explains:

[5] Examples of this molecular medical view include the immediate search for the molecular structure of a causative agent whenever a new disease is encountered, the manufacture of organisms whose gene sequences have been modified in order to study the nature or treatment of certain conditions or even the treatment of certain forms of depression, for which there exist a series of "molecularly crafted antidepressants that claim to target specific sites in neurotransmissions" (14). See Rose, 12-14 for more examples.

> biotechnological developments [are] disclos[ing] issues (such as the definition of 'human being' or the unequal distribution of resources) that have never been resolved. With this resurfacing comes the opportunity to look anew at structural inequities: local, national and global. Biotechnology is revealing those inequities, and in some cases exacerbating them (222).

In recent years, the humanities and social sciences have produced a number of projects that welcome biotechnological developments precisely because they provide the opportunity to challenge anew the continued and possibly irksome "endurance of long-standing cultural formulations which still seem to have signifying potential" (Rabinow, 146). Ranging from the cautiously optimistic to the uninhibitedly animated, these projects credit biotechnology with the potential for overcoming ingrained forms of social domination. Their claims are based on the developments that Rabinow and Rose signal to: the relative insignificance of the *origins* of biological material, now easily extractable from and transferrable between organisms, and the gradual breakdown of frontiers previously separating discrete bodies, species and ontological categories. Donna Haraway is perhaps the most unreserved in voicing her hopes that "the crucial boundary breakdowns" instigated by communications technologies and biotechnologies will allow an un-innocent yet utopian feminism to be born (151). Her "Cyborg Manifesto" embraces the cyborg, a hybrid creature whose very existence embodies "liminal transformation," defying simple categorisation as human or artefact, man or woman, individual or entity, and not easily recognisable as the member of any particular race (177). Like Rabinow, Haraway sees the Western understanding of the body as rooted in conceptions of "organic wholism" and originary wholeness (178). Such conceptions, for Haraway, are invariably mirrored in certain forms of radical social critique whose projects are undermined because they are "regularly constructed as totalities" rather than "embrac[ing] the status of partial explanation" (160). Totalities are oppressive, argues Haraway; they give rise to the

dualisms that structure practices of domination of "all those constituted as others" (177). In contrast, Haraway points us to the cyborg, who explores "the necessity of limitation [and] partiality," refusing to be understood through totalities, to conform to our search "for innocent wholeness" (178-9).

Although he voices his hopes in a tone more guarded than Haraway's, Paul Gilroy sees in the "profound transformation" wrought by the DNA revolution the roots of a radical and liberating crisis in our understanding of race and racial difference (15). The first chapter of *Against Race* welcomes recent developments in genetics and biotechnology, and sees these as the "cue to free ourselves from the bonds of all raciology in a novel and ambitious abolitionist project" (ibid). Gilroy draws our attention to the observation and visualization techniques commonly employed in contemporary biomedicine to argue that the former "representational economies that reproduced 'race' subdermally and epidermally" are slowly being eroded (43).

> When the body becomes absolutely penetrable, and is refigured as the transient epiphenomenon of coded invisible information, that aesthetic, that gaze, and that regime of power are irrecoverably over. [...] Today skin is no longer privileged as the threshold of either identity or particularity. The boundaries of 'race' have moved across the threshold of the skin. They are cellular and molecular, not dermal (47)

Furthermore, he notes, molecular biology and genetics instil in us the "awareness of the indissoluble unity of all life at the level of genetic materials [which] leads to a stronger sense of the particularity of our species as a whole..." (20). We are dealing here with a new paradigm of life in which little importance is attached to the idea of specifically racial differences. Our anxieties today, Gilroy contends, concern not our individual race but our human specificity, our fate as a species whose particularities are being altered by those same critical boundary breakdowns that Haraway holds to be so liberating.

A larger proportion of the literature that has emerged in the wake of biotechnological developments, however, examines not its potential, if rightly harnessed, to overthrow entrenched forms of social, cultural and epistemological hierarchies, but focuses, rather, on the shift in public expectations that biotechnology creates in the global North.[6] This literature explores how biotechnology inaugurates a view of biology not as destiny but as a field of *opportunity*, a view of medicine not as a practice designed to restore the body back to normality, but as a promise of desirable enhancements and *forestalled degeneration* (Rose, 20 and 51; Waldby and Mitchell, 179; Neilson, 181).[7]

Nikolas Rose holds that we now relate to ourselves as "'somatic' individuals, that is to say, as beings whose individuality is, in part at least, grounded within our fleshly, corporeal existence" (26). This heightened sense of oneself as a corporeal being becomes the target of the many narratives of health promotion in the name of bodily and psychological fitness that proliferate in both official and popular discourse.[8] Rose convincingly argues that biological conditions are no longer quietly accepted as innate and irremediable "in advanced liberal democracies, where individuals are enjoined to think of themselves as actively shaping their life course through acts of choice in the name of a better future," and, I would add, in the name of healthier bodies and longer life-spans (ibid). Rather, he says, in these countries,

---

[6] See especially Paul Rabinow, Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell, and Nikolas Rose.

[7] Rose suggests that today, medicine's goal is increasingly to transform human capacities altogether. He contrasts this with medicine's previous objectives, when the body was understood to have its natural norms which were altered during illness and subsequently restored. Today, however, these very norms "appear in principle open to conscious manipulation" and biotechnology has created entirely new norms which we accept as everyday reality (81). Brett Neilson makes much the same point when he observes that new drugs and treatments (Viagra, hormone replacement treatment, contraceptive drugs, fertility treatments) have rewritten the norms of aging male and female sexuality as well as their "timetables of reproduction" (181).

[8] Rose's argument finds echoes in Zygmunt Bauman's observations in *Life in Fragments.* Bauman holds that contemporary existence in the first world is ruled by an emphasis on corporeality that sees "[b]odily fitness as the supreme goal," and pursues this fitness through practices of "self-coercion" (119).

uneasiness about mortality is increasingly rearticulated within a rhetoric of hope, and characterised by an eager expectation for new medical developments.

Together with Brett Neilson, Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell focus on the other hope fuelled by biotechnology, and by the branch of regenerative medicine in particular: that of "perfecting the body and eliminating degeneration" (Waldby and Mitchell, 179).[9] Neilson notes that the dream of a "completely regenerative biology" is fed by "the discovery that the body does not age homogenously, but unevenly replenishes cells and tissues in certain sites", which raises hopes that sites such as the brain, prone to earlier degeneration than other parts of the body, can be treated by "bringing them into line with self-renewing sites (like the bone marrow)" (181).

It is in these narratives describing the shifting perceptions and heightened expectations of both medicine and our own bodies that the more troubling aspects of biotechnology invariably begin to creep in. When almost any of the capacities and characteristics of the human body seem potentially open to a perceived improvement by technological intervention, medicine's purpose seems to be less about curing illness and more about catering to "our desires about the kinds of people we want ourselves and our children to be" (Rose, 4). Similarly, critics such as Adele Clark and Sarah Franklin worry that biotechnology and the desires it engenders have transformed what were hitherto seen as laws of organic life into issues of choice and consumer purchasing-power (Clark, Franklin 2006). We are moving, according to Clark, into a world where normalization is coming to be replaced by customization, a world of biological "design on demand" (cited in Rose, 21).

[9] Walby and Mitchell explain that regenerative medicine "enhances the body's self-repair capacities" through various techniques, such as the use of growth factors that improve the production of red blood cells; tissue engineering, and stem cell research, which can be used to induce the 'growth' of various types of tissues (126).

Other writers express the apprehension that the celebratory discourse lauding biotechnology and its myriad therapeutic possibilities is but a veil for a "backdoor to eugenics."[10] While biotechnology may inspire dreams of improving our quality of life by preventive medicine and the presymptomatic diagnosis of individuals perceived to be at risk, these writers claim, this rhetoric obscures a sinister underside: biotechnology could give rise to practices of control that will discriminate those who parents and/or doctors hold to be biologically inferior or defective. Such fears may smack of pulp fiction or conspiracy theories, true.[11] Yet it is nevertheless undeniable that every new possibility conferred to us by biotechnology implicates us in the difficult process of determining the worth of different human lives. Prenatal scans detecting Down Syndrome are common practice in most Western countries, and in 2005 the French biotech company Intragen announced the imminent launch of a genetic diagnostic of autism: both developments confront parents with the decision of whether or not to abort the foetus, and, implicitly, to make a judgement on whether or not a certain life is worthy of being lived. Giorgio Agamben has famously traced the complex and troubling histories informing the idea that doctors, parents and patients can, indeed, *must*, decide who should live or not, decide, in short, "what life deserves to be lived" (137). Every society, he argues, decides where its 'unworthy' lives lie. Every society engages in a "valorisation and [...] 'politicisation' of life [which] [...] necessarily implies a new decision concerning the threshold beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant, [...] and can as such be eliminated without punishment"

[10] See Troy Duster's 1990 book of the same title. Nothing attests more to the transformative power that biotechnology allegedly possesses than the radically different futures that commentators predict for us in its wake: if Gilroy hopes for a raceless future to come, Duster warns against a return to oppressive regimes based on biological discrimination.
[11] It is worth noting, however, that sex-selective abortion is widely practiced in India, China and Pakistan, to cite but the most well known examples.

(139).[12] In the light of Agamben's claim, then, we might suggest that biotechnology and its medical developments are rendering this "valorisation and politicisation of life" increasingly visible, and hence, increasingly controversial.

Increasingly, biotechnology not only calls upon us to make decisions about the worthiness of a certain life; it creates liminal entities which defy our very definitions of life and death. Particularly visible in the field of new reproductive technologies, stem cell research and organ transplantation, these entities include fertilized and unfertilized ova, embryos at various stages of development, stem cell lines and the human being who is plugged into a life-support machine awaiting the harvesting of her organs. Sarah Franklin (2000) has shown that frozen embryos and stem cells have raised heated debates about their rights and the legitimacy of the practices used to create them as well as their potential destinies. Giorgio Agamben outlines the history of the new criteria for death that had to be outlined following the simultaneous developments in both life-support technology and transplant technology (160-5). For life support technology renders previous ways of determining death – cessation of breathing and of the heartbeat – obsolete; these functions continue to exist when a person is on a life-support machine even though they are otherwise irresponsive to all

[12] Citing one Hans Reiter, who contributed to a 1942 National Socialist pamphlet describing the eugenicist politics of the Reich, Agamben argues that this was a time of "radical transformation of the meaning and duties of medicine", which now becomes a crucial ally of politics (145). Agamben further notes that the concept of 'life unworthy of being lived' finds its "first juridical articulation in a well-intentioned pamphlet in favour of euthanasia" written by Karl Binding in 1920 (137). Agamben's most radical argument, however, is that modernity is characterised by the fact that "the physician and the scientist move into the no-man's land [of deciding what life is unworthy of living and hence can be killed without punishment] into which at one point the sovereign alone could penetrate" (159). Agamben claims, then, that our present political structures are related to the concept of sovereignty: life itself is constantly subjected to a judgement of worth made by oneself (suicide), or others (doctors, parents, spouses), and these decisions are sanctioned by the state (Rose, 57). As will shortly become clear, however, my study is not concerned with sovereignty and the idea of 'bare-life' and so I do not delve further into this controversial aspect of Agamben's argument. I do want to note, once again, however, that the history Agamben outlines for us in *Homo Sacer* shows that heralding biotechnology as the harbinger of a radically new socio-political time is fallacious.

stimuli. Since 1968, this irreversible coma – or brain death – is now the criteria for establishing death, even though the patient continues to breathe, albeit through the help of a life-support technology (161-2).[13]

II The "Bioeconomy"

The most widely expressed reservations regarding biotechnological developments, however, concern the bodily commodification it permits. Catherine Waldby first deployed the term "biovalue" to refer to the ways in which cadavers and their tissues are reemployed to preserve and enhance the lives of the living. Writing only seven years later, Nikolas Rose proposes that we expand our use of the term to include biological matter obtained from the living, as well as from the dead: "we can use the term to refer to the plethora of ways in which vitality itself has become a potential source of value" (32). As we saw earlier, today's medicine, informed as it is by the developments in biotechnology and genetics, fragments the human body into discrete and transferrable components. Biological tissue has thus begun to operate like any other commodity in late capitalist economies: it circulates locally and globally between different entities and individuals; it promotes public and private investment in its production and distribution and is even hailed as a new form of financial currency: "biocapital."[14] The controversy surrounding this state of affairs has led governments worldwide to pass legislation that draws the delicate lines, as Rose succinctly puts it,

[13] See also Margaret Lock's *Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death*. In a study that compares transplantation practices in the United States and Japan, Lock shows that in popular culture, death continues to be understood as occurring when the person ceases to breathe and their heart stops beating. This contrasts with the specialist's more complex, medical understanding of brain death. Lock attempts to retain both these definitions with her use of the deliberately oxymoronic term "living cadaver."

[14] "Biocapital, like any other form of circulation of capital," says Kaushik Sunder Rajan in his *Biocapital*, "involves circulation and exchange of money and commodities […] but in addition, the circulations of new and particular forms of currency, such as biological material and information, emerge." Sunder Rajan also provides a detailed analysis of the global and local flows of biological material and the capital invested in it by biotech firms in the USA and India.

demarcating "the permitted, the regulated and the forbidden" (2). As Rabinow explains, the need to implement regulations concerning what procedures can be legally carried out with human tissue arises from the disconcerting clash between traditional conceptions of the human body, which see the body as a sacred, inviolable and inalienable vessel, and the liberal view of the person, which sees the individual as a rational actor and contractual negotiator (130).[15]

Crucial to range of state strategies and policies designed to regulate the circulation of biological material is the field of bioethics. Much like the contested field which it is called upon to mediate, bioethics itself inhabits both the discourse of commodification and of "market inalienability" (Radin, 1849).[16] For, on the one hand, as Rose has argued, ethics plays a key role in market creation: products that do not come with proper ethical guarantees will not easily make their way into the global market (30). On the other hand, however, as Waldby and Mitchell argue, "most [...] bioethical work enshrines the principle that the human body exists beyond relations of commerce, that its value is intrinsic and unquantifiable" (23). Bioethicists see the commodification of biological material as tantamount to the reification of human relations, and encourage instead the voluntary donation of tissue, which they hold to be inherently more ethical (24). Waldby and Mitchell warn us, however, that to rely on gifting as a way to preserve the human body from all trace of commodification is hopelessly naive:

---

[15] Dorothy Nelkin's view aptly captures the tension between these two conceptions of the body. The extent to which biotechnology strips the body of its cultural meanings and reduces it to an object of utility, she argues, is evidenced in the language used by specialists. She warns that scientific and biomedical writing is "permeated with the commercial language of supply and demand. Body parts are *extracted* like a crop, or *mined* like a resource. Tissue is *procured* – a term more commonly used for land, goods and prostitutes" (cited in Rose, 39). Of course, extraction and mining also evoke farming, agriculture and other interactions with nature, a point I pursue in the next chapter.

[16] In her article of the same title, Margaret Jane Radin defines market-inalienability as follows: "Things that may be given away but not sold are market-inalienable" (1849). Radin's definition implicitly sets up a distinction between the gift and the commodity, an opposition frequently encountered in the field of biotechnology, and which I examine in more detail below.

> This laudable principle has become vexed in the area of tissue donation by the rapidly increasing commercial value of the tissue *after it has been donated*. [...] Donated tissue may be either sold by the receiving party (hospitals routinely sell tissues to pharmaceutical or cosmetics companies, for example) or transformed into cell lines or gene sequences and patented. [...] Effectively, [the] strategy to make the human body a bulwark against the commodification of social life, a strategy now institutionalized in bioethical procedure, has simply rendered the body an open source of free biological material for commercial use (23-4).

Waldby and Mitchell's point is perhaps best illustrated in what many critics have described as "biocolonialism": the patenting and commercialization of the consensually donated genetic materials of indigenous peoples.[17]

Biocolonialism. Biovalue. Biocapital. These neologisms attest to the undeniable fact that "[t]he two universalized productions of Western bourgeois culture – technoscience and modern rationalized capitalism – have entered into a new relationship with each other" (Rabinow, 136). It is my aim in this project to interrogate just this relationship, this "bioeconomy" (Rose, 6). I do so with the help of the ideas of Marx and Hannah Arendt and three core fictional texts, all of which remind us that at

---

[17] Debra Harry, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Aroha Te Pareake Mead, Deborah Halbert and Priscilla Wald all employ the term "biocolonialism". An extended discussion falls outside the scope of this project, although I do return to the issue of patenting in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that two commonly cited examples of biocolonialism refer to the Guaymi people of Western Panama and the Hagahai people of Papua New Guinea, the blood of whom contains antibodies that are resistant to a certain kind of leukemia, and whose donated tissue – obtained on the grounds that it would be used to facilitate medical research – was subsequently developed into patented cell lines in the United States. The Gauymi and Hagahai can claim no property right or profit from these patents, although, following legal action on the part of the Guaymi people, the USA did withdraw its patent (see Halbert, 120-2 and 130). Aroha Te Pareake Mead draws an explicit link with colonial practices in her exposition of the indigenous peoples' position: "Human genes are being treated by science in the same way that indigenous 'artifacts' were gathered by museums; collected, stored, immortalized, reproduced, engineered – all for the sake of humanity and public education, or so we are asked to believe" (cited in Halbert, 130). Ironically, however, the spokespersons for the indigenous peoples whose genetic materials are being marketed by biotechnological companies in the West often resort to the very language and rhetoric that Waldby and Mitchell problematize above. As Debora J. Halbert explains, "Instead of allowing the human individual to be divided into parts that become easily commodified, the language of Indigenous rights advocates refuses to allow the individual, or communities of individuals, to be understood as anything less than a totality" (131).

stake in this new relationship is a humanist distinction which seems less and less straightforward: the distinction between that which is *not* human – and therefore legitimately ownable, commodifiable and killable – and that which *is* human – and therefore spared of such treatment.[18] I have chosen, however, to focus exclusively on the phenomenon of organ transplantation, a decision which warrants clarification.

Biotechnology and the life sciences are increasingly entangled in financial, legal, interpersonal and global circuits, weighed down with aspirations and desires, anxieties and ethical qualms. I contend that the field of organ transplantation is where these social circuits and responses to the arcane are at their most visible. While the commodification of all manner of biological tissue is rife, it is the commodification of organs and their market-price that is most widely discussed and documented. [19] And as we shall see shortly, it is with specific reference to the transplantable organ that many scientists and bioethicists are now advocating the legalisation of the trade in body parts, thereby calling into question our post-Abolition definition of the human as a being who cannot be bought or sold, and severely angering those who insist that organs should always be donated as life-conferring gifts.

Furthermore, the geographical flow of both illegally commodified and legally donated organs can be mapped to offer a clear example of the routes that body parts

[18] Nikolas Rose makes a very similar point. See *The Politics of Life Itself*, 39. I also want to clarify here, once again, that although I use the term 'killable' I am not concerned, as Giorgio Agamben is, with the problematic of sovereignty and the *homo sacer* who can be legitimately killed without punishment. Rather, I am referring to the liminal entities created by biotechnology that I mention above: embryos, brain-dead patients, etc.

[19] So pervasive is the notion that there is an expanding and lucrative market for healthy, transplantable organs that it has become commonplace for newspapers and entertainment websites to make this market into the target of both sensationalist stories and incisive black humour. Witness, for instance, the May 6 2008 article in British tabloid *The Daily Sport* [sic!], whose headline proffers tongue-in-cheek advice on how to "beat the credit crunch." The paper's proposed solution is that you "flog your organ," and reports that one can claim £25,000 for a kidney and £20,000 for a liver. In January 2007, a youtube.com user uploaded a cartoon telling the story of Charlie, a taciturn unicorn who is dragged by his two friends to "Candy Mountain." Despite his reluctance, Charlie is pressured to enter Candy Mountain cave, and emerges alone, dazed, scarred and in pain to find that "they took [his] frigging kidney." The video can still be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdpEyX9mXFY (last accessed 1 August 2008).

travel, and the extent to which the success of transplant technology, where healthy organs must be delivered swiftly to the waiting patient, hinges on the "time-space compression" that is characteristic of globalization and late capitalism (Harvey). I propose, however, that this map of global organ flows also allows us to trace the outlines of a new relationship between first and third world bodies, one that is informed not just by the increasingly "somatic" ethic through which the first world citizen understands her body (Rose, 26), but by specific developments within the field of transplantation. Perhaps my most contentious claim, however, is that through a careful consideration of the organ-as-commodity we might begin to see that biotechnology has taken the commodification of the body to levels unchartered by materialist readings of the human body and the commodification of its inherent capacity to labour.[20] I dedicate the entirety of my next chapter to this analysis. To pave the ground for it, however, let us first turn to two specific and pertinent developments in organ transplantation: the miraculous drugs that are responsible for the transplantation boom and the urge to legalize the market in human organs.

The innate and recurrent medical problem with transplantation, Renée Fox and Judith Swazey point out, is the "unrelenting intolerance of individuals to grafts of other people's tissues and organs" (10). The problem, essentially, is immunological: the transplant patient's immune system rejects 'foreign' tissue. In the early days of transplantation, therefore, successful transplants were only likely to ensue in the case of monozygotic twins. Following the subsequent biomedical development in tissue typing techniques designed to evaluate donor-patient compatibility, doctors could

[20] Given the specific nature of my concerns in this project, my focus throughout is on the live organ that is treated, procured, exchanged and used as though it were any other naturally occurring resource. For this reason, I do not concentrate on the kinship networks created by organ transplantation or on what anthropologists Renée Fox and Judith Swazey have called "the tyranny of the gift" – a term they use to allude to the range of emotions surrounding the process of transplantation: relatives' pressure to donate, patients' guilt or debt towards the donor, or even patients' aversion to the knowledge that their body is now prostheticized (39). See "Organ Exchange as Gift Exchange", the second chapter of *Spare Parts*.

successfully transplant organs from related donors whose tissue matched that of the patient (Fox and Swazey, *The Courage to Fail*).[21] In the early 1980s, however, cyclosporine erupted onto the transplant scene. Described as a "wonder drug" and hailed as the remarkable immunosuppressant that would revolutionize transplantation, by 1989, cyclosporine had become the drug that was "almost universally given to transplantation recipients" (cited in Fox and Swazey, 4).[22] What began with the widespread use of cyclosporine now continues with subsequently developed immunosuppressive agents: as immunosuppressants increasingly "forestall the body's immune system from defensively rejecting tissue and organ transplants as foreign" a growing number of medical practitioners and institutions have been "emboldened […] to enter the field, to transplant a wider spectrum of organs, […] and to perform a greater number of retransplants" (Fox and Swazey, xvi).

There is an aspect of post-cyclosporine transplantation that Fox and Swazey allude to here only implicitly. Lawrence Cohen, however, spells it out for us: "Cyclosporine *globalizes*" (11). In other words: if cyclosporine allows for more transplants, this is because immunosuppressant agents create a far larger group of potential organ donors than ever existed before (ibid). In its infancy, Cohen observes, suitable organs were procured through techniques that relied on *recognition*: donor and patient tissues needed to be tested for "the recognition of molecular sameness and difference" (ibid). Today, however, transplantation relies on *suppression*: "[d]ifference is selectively suppressed" allowing for entire groups of unrelated individuals to become "same enough" for the purposes of transplantation (12). It is thanks to this

[21] All subsequent citations from Fox and Swazey refer to their second book, *Spare Parts*.
[22] Fox and Swazey observe that although by the late 1980s cyclosporine was discovered to have some serious side-effects, therefore requiring an ongoing quest for less toxic immunosuppressive agents, the predominant attitude of medical professionals was that of a dogged belief "in the existence of a utopian, magic-bullet kind of therapy" (5). The sobering discoveries about cyclosporine not withstanding, then, the 1990s saw the clinical trials of FK 506, another immunosuppressant, that was greeted, "like cyclosporine before it, as transplantation's 'miracle drug'" (6).

technique of donor recruitment-through-suppression, he argues, that transplantation has become such a major industry (ibid).[23]

Cyclosporine has transformed organs from "recalcitrant objects with nearly unique histio-profiles" into standardized, replaceable body parts (Waldby and Mitchell, 171). This has meant that since the 1980s, transplantation has become more "commonplace and routinized" resulting in a shift of outlook in the field: immunological rejection of the organ has ceased to be a primary concern (Fox and Swazey, 44). Much more worrying is the chronic shortage of transplantable organs for the ever-increasing number of people whose physical condition could be improved with a 'foreign' organ that is ever less likely to be immunologically rejected. The field of modern medicine that was perhaps the most laden with the intimate, complex and symbolic associations of altruistic gifting and miraculous resurrection is viewed today as a field in crisis, burdened by the problem of scarce supply and exorbitant demand.

Fox and Swazey claim that the most profound change emerging from and complementing this language of supply and demand is the serious consideration that transplant specialists have now begun to give to the commodification and marketization of organs, a practice that most national governments explicitly forbid.[24] While most advocates of commodification focus on cadaveric rather than live organ

---

[23] Lesley Sharp, too, observes that "transplantation is as lucrative as it is medically miraculous" (12). Her study documents how organ transplantation has shifted to the corporate model as medical institutions and transplant surgeons are under increasing pressure for a higher number of successful transplants in order to draw in major investments and funds (25).

[24] Perhaps the most notable exception is Iran, where the sale of organs is legally sanctioned by the government. The three nation-states that I will allude to in the course of this dissertation, however, are the United States, the United Kingdom and India, all of which have legislation in place forbidding the sale and purchase of human organs. See the US government's 1984 National Organ Transplantation Act (<http://history.nih.gov/01Docs/historical/documents/PL98-507.pdf>); the UK's 1989 Human Organs Transplant Act (<https://www.uktransplant.org.uk/ukt/about_transplants/legislation/human_organ_transplants_act/human_organ_transplants_act.jsp>) and Part 9 (1) and (3) of India's 1994 Transplantation of Human Organs Act (<http://www.medindia.net/indian_health_act/the-transplantation-of-human-organs-act-1994-authority-for-removal-of-human-organs.htm>). Last accessed on August 1 2008.

sales, the rhetoric used by proponents of either strategy is similar: virtually all of these propositions, as Waldby and Mitchell note, begin with a "ritual recitation of the statistics of waiting list deaths" in order to mark current donation systems as inadequate and inefficient (Joralemon, cited in Waldby and Mitchell, 170).[25] Secondly, however, most proponents share a conviction that an individual's body is her personal property, to be disposed of as she wishes. Fox and Swazey cite a common conviction shared by supporters of commodification which I will explore at length in the following chapter: "*I am advocating not that people be treated by others as property, but only that they have the autonomy to treat their own parts as property, particularly their regenerative parts*. Such an approach is helpful, rather than harmful, to people's well-being" (71, emphasis added).

In the now well-known conclusion to their second book on the subject, Fox and Swazey themselves announced their decision to abandon their research in the field of transplantation citing their uneasiness with this market rhetoric and the excessive fervour with which organs were pursued. Critical of the "pervasive reluctance to accept the biological and human condition limits imposed by the aging process" that they gleaned during their research, they believed that "the missionary-like ardour about organ replacement that now exists […] and the seemingly limitless attempts to procure and implant organs that are currently taking place [had] got out of hand" (204). Their conclusion sought both to clarify and to caution:

[25] Most proposals in favour of live organs markets focus on the kidney, which is the easiest organ to surrender 'live' given that the body has a second kidney to rely on. Whether cadaveric organs are purchased directly from their consenting owner at the time she was still alive, or whether they are paid for in the form of monetary compensation for surviving kin, payment for cadaveric organs remains mired in the same controversy that surrounds all cadaveric organ transplants. As Sharp points out in her study, one of transplantation's defining ideological underpinnings "involves the necessity of embracing brain death criteria as evidence of absolute death" (27). Characteristically, Agamben makes a much more radical argument: citing one transplant surgeon, Dr Shumway's comment that "I'm saying anyone whose brain is dead is dead. It is the one determinant that would be universally applicable, because the brain is the one organ that can't be transplanted," Agamben claims that death has now become "the epiphenomenon of transplant technology" (163). If we follow this logic, Agamben argues, the day that brains can be transplanted, we will have to come up with yet another criterion for death.

> By our leave-taking, we are intentionally separating ourselves from what we believe has become an overly zealous medical and societal commitment to the endless perpetuation of life and to repairing and rebuilding people through organ replacement (210).

Equipped with a drug that suppresses immunological difference and thus multiplies the number of potentially available organ donors, this "zealous societal commitment" to the perpetuation of life through biotechnology has resulted in increased calls for legalized markets in human organs that are seen as regenerative components rather than as "living parts of a person" (207). Fox and Swazey, then, perceive the drive to procure as many organs as possible, albeit through monetary incentives, as "leading us to unreflectively disassemble and dehumanize the body" (208).

My own opinion, however, is that there is a change much more profound than the increased number of proposals for the legally sanctioned market-alienability of organs: the growth of a real and global black market for kidneys and corneas from live donors hailing mostly from the global South. Many, of course, have cited this phenomenon in order to echo Fox and Swazey's discomfort with the dehumanizing exploitation that it entails and read it as an epiphenomenon of globalization and the economic disparities it creates. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes has noted, the trafficked human organs in this illicit but blooming trade travel a route that mirrors the circuit of capital in the era of globalization: "from South to North, from Third to First World, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white" (197). Waldby and Mitchell observe that the global nature of tissue exchange results from the 'compressed' world created by globalization, with its challenge to transactions once "characterized by national citizenship and the body of law and governance that regulates national space" (23).

If my own work sympathises with and participates in these efforts to highlight that the combined effects of globalization and transplant biotechnology can reduce the

global poor to organ providers for the rich, I believe that it is equally important to insist on the fact that this illegal trade is the place from which we can most clearly see the desires that citizens of North *and* South have invested in biotechnology, globalization and late capitalism. I contend that texts such as *Harvest* and *Dirty Pretty Things* illustrate this, as I argue in chapters 3 and 4 respectively, but I want to stress that these same desires – often expressed as productive counsel – are also powerfully at work in the scholarly projects I have examined here. Thus, Lawrence Cohen, for instance, holds the development of cyclosporine and the shortage of human organs that it has helped to create accountable for the fact that entire subpopulations of those who are "unlike oneself, not kin, not cared for, far away in structural and spatial terms" have now become 'same enough' to be "surgically disagreggated and their parts reincorporated" (12, 23). Yet if Cohen denounces difference-curbing cyclosporine for the global predatory networks it engenders, Paul Gilroy implicitly seizes on the very same globalizing properties of immunosuppressant drugs to underscore that the international trade in human organs is "therefore necessarily 'transracial'" (20). And rightly so. In a project like Gilroy's, which that biotechnology's demand that we reconceptualize our very idea of life no longer allows for an enabling and productive understanding of racial difference, the illegal trade in organs is a powerful case in point: what could illustrate the obsoleteness of race and the vogue of genetically codified information more vividly than the unproblematic incorporation of an organ purchased from the radically other?[26]

"Health," wrote René Leriche, "is life lived in the silence of the organs" (cited in Canguilhem, 46). If this definition of health is still pertinent today, we might argue,

---

[26] "Messages, information, programs, codes, instructions, decoding: these are the new concepts of the life sciences." So wrote Georges Canguilhem in 1966, following Watson and Crick's article on the double-helix structure of DNA. (Cited in Rose, 44)

it is only because transplant technology suppresses organs into *re*-silence. Thanks to transplant technology, organs are no longer “silent” even for those who *are* healthy: extractable, reusable and much-coveted, they mobilize economies both licit and illicit, generating, in the wake of their travels, hopes and misgivings as to “what we might legitimately desire, and what desires might legitimately be denied” (Rose, 104). In this project, I reflect on how that which lay silently dormant in the human body has now been awoken to a contested territory inhabited by science, technology, commerce, mores of great cultural significance and, crucially, a global community of citizens both healthy and ill. Some final words, then, on the set of texts I have chosen to carry out this task.

III. The organ in labour and fiction

The organ is trapped in myriad contradictory discourses that interrogate our definitions of the human. Biotechnology, I contend, challenges some of the key ideas that have contributed to our understanding of what exactly constitutes the human and how the human should be treated. The two fields that I am most concerned with in this project are Marxism, with its denouncement of the dehumanization of the worker through the exploitative extraction of her surplus labour, and postcolonial studies, with its demonstration that the universalist aspirations of Western ideals of morality and ethics were severely compromised by their inability to encompass the humanity of racialized, colonized subjects.

Chapter 2 compares the alienation of the organ with Marx’s views on the alienation of labour-power. Arising innately from the body, both the organ and labour-power are alienated in ways considered by many to be inhuman and exploitative. Labour-power, Marx held, is a special kind of commodity. And the organ? Is it biocapital, generated by a new mode of production? Is it a ‘fabricated’ product? Does

it fall, in other words, under the category of what Arendt terms the “artificial world of things”? (7) Is the organ produced through labour? If so, then surely we can extend this definition to human cells? And it cells are produced through labour, then why does the law grant patents to *inventors* of new cell lines and not to the people from whom the cells were originally extracted? Perhaps the organ is a special kind of natural resource? Might this explain why bioethics condemns the sale of organs, while the donation of an organ is hailed as an act of supreme altruism? What is clear, however, is that the organ, thanks to advances in transplant technology, as we have seen, has become a valuable commodity. I read the commodification of the organ together with Hannah Arendt’s critique of Marx and Marx’s own writings on the commodity, on labour-power and on the role of land, to argue that the commoditization of the organ is the result of two related phenomena: 1) the perception of one’s body parts as a naturally occurring surplus, and 2) the appeal to the idea of property in the human body and the concomitant right to freely dispose of this property as one sees fit.

The remaining chapters focus on fictional texts that stage the discursive, geographical and corporeal boundaries through which the organ moves. All the texts I examine here stage this trajectory in fictional representations that speculate on both the realities and the possibilities of contemporary transplant technology and bodily commodification. Sociologically inclined critics often deride cultural texts that address biotechnological developments for their sensationalist predictions and ill-researched alarmism. My own belief, however, is that my chosen texts do not draw on this topic as a convenient back-drop against which to unravel a thriller or horror plot. Rather, transplantation is at the forefront of these texts as they both articulate and enjoin us to critically examine the human relationships, economic conditions and social dynamics that transplantation both generates and relies upon. These fictional texts confirm my

own belief that the most controversial debate in the field of transplantation – whether or not to legally commercialise human organs – is, in a sense, irrelevant. The scenarios envisaged in these texts alert us to the pressing fact that legalizing organs markets will neither eradicate exploitation, not circumvent the profound moral questions raised by the promise of organ transplants to indefinitely prolong one's life thanks to the body of another.

Chapter 3 explores organ sales as they occur across the geopolitical frontiers separating the first and third world. Indian writer Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest* locates the scene of organ transplantation in a futuristic postcolonial Bombay in which organ trade is no longer a criminalised activity. The Indian protagonist is "recruited" by a transnational corporation to sell the rights to his entire body to an anonymous white American buyer. My reading examines the writer's use of science-fiction, suggesting that the organ transplant enables and requires Padmanabhan to displace the dominant literary genres of postcolonial literature. I further argue that the play's attentiveness to biotechnology reconfigures the dominant concerns of postcolonial studies: in 2010, if the slum-dwellers of 2010 Bombay do meet the white, wealthy dwellers of North America this encounter is no longer informed by the colonial strategies of settlement and territorial expansion, for the new imperialists, the Americans of 2010, choose not to set foot in what they see as the disease-infested third-world and interact with Indians solely through technological gadgets. The chapter explores how *Harvest* suggests that Americans' unfettered access to biotechnology and telecommunications reconfigures the relationship between first and third world bodies familiar to us from colonialism's heyday: while the third- world citizen in *Harvest* is still perceived by her first-world counterpart as simultaneously desirable and threatening, this is not because of her colour and her customs but because of her ability to remain healthy in spite of her dismal living conditions.

Chapter 4 sees us back in Old Europe, the former metropole that is no longer struggling with the burden of empire but is concerned instead to curb the uncontrollable wave of immigrants hailing from less prosperous regions. My argument here centres on the notion of commodified hospitality and on Stephen Frears's film *Dirty Pretty Things*. The film is unusual: the organ-sellers it represents are undocumented immigrants who sell their body-parts not for cash, but for fake EU passports that will allow them to remain in London. The forged passports can be bought in exchange for a kidney, and what they sell is not citizenship, but the right to hospitality in the UK. The film permanently signals to the commodification of hospitality in this, its political sense, by locating the illegal extraction of kidneys in a hotel, a sphere of legitimate commodified hospitality. I challenge existing readings of *Dirty Pretty Things* which view it as a metaphor for the UK's exploitation of immigrant labour, arguing that the film's narrative operates according to the same discursive structures that characterise contemporary capitalism and its accompanying biotechnologies.

In my fifth and final chapter, my investigation veers away from concerns about racial difference and economic inequality and become geographically more unmoored, to focus instead on one of the key issues in bioethics today: our struggle to accommodate the new beings and "life-forms" which biotechnology now has the power to create.[27] The chapter discusses Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go*. Ishiguro's narrative transpires in Hailsham, a boarding school in an unnamed location in rural England of the late 1990s. Its students, we discover, are clones, special "citizens" whose role in society is to provide organs for the ill. Hailsham students do this not because they are willing donors, or even poor organ sellers: this is,

[27] I will discuss the term "life-forms" in the next chapter.

quite simply, their reason for existing. Products of human ingenuity and of new medical technologies, Hailsham's clones, however, emerge not as robotic quasi-humans, but as young adults who, thanks to the humanist liberal arts education provided for them at Hailsham, are avid critics and creators of art and literature. Focusing on the novel's representation of the donor-clones as doubly produced through medical technology and a humanist education, I examine the ways in which Hailsham students emerge as exceptional subjects who inhabit the interstitial space between humanity and instrumentality. My concern in this chapter is to interrogate the relationship between literary narration and its recipient, the addressee. I argue that the transplant as represented in this novel enjoins us, through a narrator who addresses her interlocutors as fellow-clones, to rethink our understanding of the human and its relationship to what Hannah Arendt terms "the human artifice."

Two final citations before I move on to what I promise here. Both ask us to be attentive to our human commonality and our human diversity, a request that the field of organ transplantation, perhaps more than any other biotechnological development, is immersed in by definition, as we have seen. Both are crucial to bear in mind in order to understand my concerns in this dissertation. The first of these remarks is made by Paul Gilroy. Thanks to biotechnology, he says, "we have been made more sceptical than ever about the status of easily visible differences and are now obliged to ask on what scale human sameness and human diversity are to be calibrated" (47). This dissertation is the response I have derived to this obligatory interrogation by paying particular attention to the commodified human organ and the biological human sameness and economic diversity it reveals along its travels. The second remark is made by Hannah Arendt. "Political equality," she says, "is the very opposite of our equality before death" (215). In a sense, this dissertation asks whether Arendt's observation still holds in the wake of biotechnological developments in the field of

transplantation. What if, I want to ask, political inequality becomes the very same thing as our inequality before death?

Chapter 1

SPECIAL COMMODITIES: NATURE, LABOUR-POWER AND THE LIVE HUMAN ORGAN

I Three concepts

Marxists and post-Marxists may disagree about whether 'biocapitalism' is a novel 'mode of production,' but the existence and significance of biocapital, as a way of thinking and acting, cannot be disputed.

Nikolas Rose, The Politics of Life Itself

This chapter intervenes in the Marxist and post-Marxist disagreements that Rose alludes to above. Rose, in fact, does not clarify what Marxists and post-Marxists he has in mind. My own argument engages with Marx's own writings, and with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Multitude*, perhaps the most influential of post-Marxist texts to have discussed the commodification of biological material.[1] Does the commodification of biological material arise from a new mode of production? Moreover, can we even refer to biological material as emerging from a process of production? As I examine their responses to these questions, what will become clear is that the commodified live organ possesses certain particularities which unsettle Hardt and Negri's general attempts to locate commodified biological material within a novel mode of production. It is my contention here that it is in fact the work of Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt that is most helpful in explicating what kind of social product the organ is, and in unpacking the conception of the human that organ commodification proposals are predicated upon.

As we saw in the previous chapter, if organs can today be extracted from human beings while they are still alive, this is because of remarkable biotechnological

[1] Although they do not devote an entire book-length study to this issue, Hardt and Negri do dedicate a section of *Multitude* to it. See section 2.2, *De Corpore*.

developments in the fields of both transplantation surgery and immunology. These very developments, of course, allow for the emergence of the global black market in human organs, and the call from some to legalise organ markets in the hope of making the allocation of this biological material more effective and equitable, as well as regulating and curbing the current illegal trade in organs.[2]

Regardless, however, of where one stands on the legalization debate, the commodification of the organ, legally sanctioned or otherwise, results in a situation whereby one can "regard one's own body as a *property relation*" (Scheper-Hughes, 51, emphasis added). Implicitly at work in the case of a person who decides to sell their organ, this reasoning is very explicitly stated in the case of market proponents. Indeed, as one vocal advocate of legalising the sale and purchase of organs stated when presenting his case to Scheper-Hughes: "The bottom line is that the body belongs to the individual" (42). And so, the logic goes, like any commodity owner, the individual is free to dispose of her possession as she pleases; it is her inalienable right to sell her body parts if she so wishes. More nuanced, and infinitely more suggestive, however, is the argument of the unnamed supporter of organs markets that Fox and Swazey cite: "*I am advocating not that people be treated by others as property, but only that they have the autonomy to treat their own parts as property, particularly their regenerative parts*" (71, emphasis added).

The word that interests me here is "regenerative." Evoking as it does "images of renewal and rebirth, rather than extraction […] and decay," the term confirms Lesley Sharp's observation that the language of transplantation is steeped in analogies

---

[2] While, as I clarified earlier, I do not engage here in the debate over whether or not the organ trade should be legalised, it is important to note, as Waldby and Mitchell do, that legalisation will not necessarily eradicate the black market as there will always be a waiting list for organs, and hence, a market for 'jumping the queue', as it were: "for the wealthy on organ waiting lists, a kidney is literally priceless" (177).

designed to elicit a comparison of the human body with nature (15). The field, she notes, abounds in rhetorical moves and naturalistic metaphors: thus, just as nature renews itself, so does the human body thanks to transplantation; just as crops are harvested to fulfill our basic need for sustenance, so organs are harvested as a way of reaping and providing life (ibid). Similarly, Waldby and Mitchell remark that proponents of market solutions for the shortage in transplantable organs often refer to them as "resources," a term that evokes visions of a natural reserve of supplies waiting to be drawn upon and used (170).

But there is more to be said here. As a transitive verb, the *OED* tells us, 'to regenerate' has the meaning of "*to bring* into renewed existence" (emphasis added). This, we might assume, is the sense in which Fox and Swazey's prototypical market advocate uses the term: the functional organ sold by one person will be brought to its purchaser to replace her own dysfunctional organ. In its *intransitive* sense, however, 'to regenerate' means "*to come* into renewed existence" (emphasis added). This second definition, admittedly somewhat elided in the adjective 'regenerative,' points to a crucial particularity of the organ: unlike hair or semen, the organ is *not* regenerative: it cannot come into renewed existence for the body does not produce it anew.

Private property, nature and the different degrees of self-renewal that the human body is capable of. We now have in place the constellation of concepts with which to explore the peculiar commodity that, thanks to biotechnology, the organ has now become.

II Conceptualizing the Organ as Commodity

I should warn my readers that the argument in this section rests on a paradox. The organ-as-commodity, I contend, needs to be understood in terms of the two Marxian

concepts that it most resembles *and* most radically departs from: land (as described by Marx) and labour-power. That the organ has become a form of private property under today's late capitalism is, in the light of the flourishing black market and the market proposals we have already examined, undeniable. Especially relevant to my purposes, then, is Karl Marx's argument that capitalism and its mode of production become possible only when land and labour-power become a special form of private property.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx clarifies his ideas on the notion of private property, that is, on how objects produced through a worker's labour are distributed in the world. The key to understanding private property, Marx argues, lies in:

> *transforming* the question of the *origin* of *private property* into the question of *alienated labour* to the course of human development. For in speaking of private property one imagines that one is dealing with something external to man. In speaking of labour one is dealing immediately with man himself. This new way of formulating the problem already contains its solution (*Early Writings,* 333).

For Marx, capitalism is characterized by the fact that products of labour are appropriated to become the private property of the capitalist, who possesses both the means of production and the ability to pay the labourer wages in exchange for his labour. For this reason, Marx can confidently proclaim in the *Manuscripts* that "*wages* and *private property* are identical" (332). It is with these same arguments in mind that Hannah Arendt can describe Marx's ideas as "the most revolutionary contribution to the concept of property" which is the case, she argues, because Marx conceives of property not as "a fixed and firmly located part of the world acquired by its owner in one way or another but, on the contrary [as having] *its source in man himself, in his possession of a body and his indisputable ownership of the strength of his body, which Marx called labour-power*" (70, emphasis added). Friedrich Engels, too, insisted that

labour-power was the most original element in Marx's understanding of political economy, for it is from labour-power's special characteristics as a commodifiable possession that all other commodities originate. Before we explore this further, however, a brief look at how Marx defines the commodity is in order.

First of all, says Marx, "the commodity is an *external* object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs," he adds, "whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference" (*Capital I*, 125, emphasis added). A commodity, moreover, has both a qualitative and a quantitative aspect. In the commodity's qualitative aspect, resides its use-value: "The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value. But this usefulness does not dangle in mid-air. It is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter. […] Use-values are only realised in use or consumption. […] In the form of society to be considered here [read, the capitalist mode of production] they [use-values] are also the material bearers of … exchange-value" (126). Exchange-value, says Marx, is the quantitative dimension of the commodity; it is "the proportion in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind" (ibid). However, Marx argues, the property that renders two commodities commensurable is the fact that they both contain a common element. This common element is *value*, or the quantity of abstract human labour objectified within a given commodity.[3] Exchange-value is hence "the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance, of value" and emerges as such under the conditions of capitalism (128)

---

[3] Duncan Foley cogently summarises what Marx means by "abstract labour." "[I]n a commodity-producing society," says Foley, "all types of concrete labour have the capacity to produce value. When we abstract from the concrete peculiarities of specific types of labour, we are left with the common character of production of value," [*Understanding Capital*, 16]. This common character of all labour, then, is abstract labour.

Engels further clarifies, in a parenthetical comment inserted to prevent the misconception that every product consumed by someone other than its producer is a commodity, that "*in order to become a commodity, the product must be transferred to the other person, for whom it serves as a use-value, through the medium of exchange*" (*Capital I*, 131, emphasis added). Marx's explanations, his insistence that the commodity is an external object and Engels's elucidating comment suggest that all commodities possess the following characteristics: they are tangible, material objects with both a use and an exchange-value; they result from the process of production, and they must be produced specifically in order to be exchanged, which can only occur if the commodity has been previously appropriated as one's own private property.

Two notable exceptions to these stipulations are immediately apparent, especially given my concerns in this chapter. The above list seems to leave room for neither naturally occurring products which do not result from the production process, nor for labour-power, which hardly seems to be an external object.[4] Marx is aware of this, however, and dedicates separate sections of *Capital* to account for these special cases. I propose that we turn, first, to naturally occurring products in order to further explore the parallels between nature and the human organ that are evidenced in the language of transplantation. As we shall see, Marx's comments about nature also offer clues about labour-power, that other 'special' case which the organ also closely resembles.

[4] I am reminded here of the argument through which Hegel tries to explain why wage-labour is justified, while slavery is not: "Single products of my particular physical and mental skill and of my power to act I can alienate to someone else and I can give him the use of my abilities for a restricted period, because *on the strength of this restriction*, my abilities acquire an external relation to the totality and universality of my being" (Cited in Radin, 1894, emphasis added). As Margaret Radin explains, Hegel, held that "(t)he reason I can alienate my property is that it is mine only insofar as I put my will into it." However, as Radin takes care to point out, Hegel lays down a crucial condition: one can alienate one's property "provided always that the thing in question is a thing external by nature." His attempt to justify wage-labour, as Radin rightly argues, signals to "the practical problems" presented by the attempt to determine what things are "external by nature" and which are not. See Radin, "Market-Inalienability," 1892-4.

Marx singles out nature as an exception in the very first section of the first volume of *Capital*. "A thing can be a use-value without being a value. This is the case," he adds, "*whenever its utility to man is not mediated through labour*. Air, virgin soil, natural meadows, unplanted forests, etc, fall into this category" (131, emphasis added). Not until the third volume of *Capital*, however, does he explore these particular use-values in detail. Here, he discusses the question of ground rent, the fixed, monthly sum of money that a tenant pays the owner of land in order to purchase the right to use it. He alludes, as does the transplantation rhetoric with which I am concerned, to the activities of agriculture and mining, thereby allowing for a pertinent comparison between the two: just as use-values can be extracted from nature in the form of minerals and crops, so can they be extracted from the body in the form of organs and other tissue.

More important for my purposes here, however, is the way in which Marx proceeds to distinguish between value and price. Though the existence of ground rent might suggest that land has a value, he says, the "value of the land [is] a category that is *prima facie* irrational, in the same way that the price of labour-power is irrational, since the earth is not a product of labour, and thus does not have a value" (*Capital III,* 760). What I want to dwell on here is the question of why something with no value can still generate a price, a money-sum for which it can be exchanged. To this, Marx provides a very definitive answer:

> [T]he prices of things that have no value in and of themselves – either not being products of labour, like land, or which cannot be reproduced by labour, such as antiques, works of art by certain masters, etc. – may be determined by quite fortuitous combinations of circumstances. *For a thing to be sold, it simply has to be capable of being monopolised and alienated* (772, emphasis added).

The interesting case of non-reproducible products of labour and works of art, I will return to in Chapter 5. For now, let us consider only land and the process through which it became possible to fetch money for it. The fixed, agreed-upon money-sum that land commands, in the form of rent if it is leased, in the form of price if it is sold, results from the phenomenon of landed property. "Landed property," says Marx, "presupposes that certain persons enjoy the monopoly of disposing of particular portions of the globe as exclusive spheres of their private will to the exclusion of all others" (752).[5] Landed property is "a historical precondition for the capitalist mode of production" (754) and exists in a legal form that alienates certain portions of land and decrees them as the exclusive possession of a given individual. What this means in practice, says Marx, is that "the landowner can behave in relation to the land just as any commodity owner can with his commodities" (753). Effectively then, the capitalist mode of production is a social development built upon its ability to harness, monopolise and alienate into private property the very "nature [that] provides the necessary means of subsistence – whether in products of the land, animal or vegetable, or in fisheries, etc" (770).

Initially, then, an interrogation of organ commodification might lead us to place the human body firmly within the same category as Marx's irrationally priced "use-values without value." The field of transplantation certainly invites us to do so, not just in its naturalistic rhetoric, but also in its call for legalizing bodily commodification by advocating that we treat our bodies as our own private property. The comparison finds still further support when we factor in the biotechnological developments discussed in the previous chapter: if something need only be alienated and monopolised in order to be rendered saleable, then the advent of extremely

[5] Marx adds a footnote here in which he criticizes Hegel's notion of private property in land, for as he says, the individual person can hardly maintain himself as proprietor by his 'will' alone. Furthermore, he asks, where does the person set limits for the realization of his will? See *Capital III*, 752-3, fn26.

efficient immunosuppressant drugs has very effectively achieved this for the organ. Crucially, however, the comparison shows the extent to which biotechnology has generated a conception of the body which sees it as endowed with a range of naturally occurring resources which we should not squander. As Fox and Swazey have shown us, doctors and their transplant-awaiting patients express this view of the human body in their "zealous medical and societal commitment to the endless perpetuation of life and to repairing and rebuilding people" through the organ-cum-natural-resource (204). But the organ-seller, too, has begun to view her body in terms of resources which should not be wasted. This is largely why live organ sales are possible in the first place: the organ-seller typically parts with the organ that the human body has a natural 'spare' of, such as the kidney or the cornea.

But there are limits to the parallels. Firstly, land is from the outset an *external* object; unlike the organ or labour-power, it does not arise from man's body nor from its components and capacities. Furthermore, we need to consider again the phrase "use-value without value" and its relevance to describe the organ. Land, we recall, abounds in use-value. Appropriated as private property, it fetches a price. Yet it contains no value, *because it is not mediated through labour*. And it is by no means certain, I contend, that we can make this claim for the organ. I clarify my apprehensions, then, by turning to Marx's second special case: labour-power.

"The capitalist epoch," clarifies Marx in a footnote, "is [...] characterised by the fact that labour-power*, in the eyes of the worker himself,* takes on the form of a commodity which is his property" (*Capital I*, 274, fn 4, emphasis added). And now, let us revisit the terms in which our unnamed organs market advocate defends his position: "I am advocating not that people be treated by others as property*, but only that they have the autonomy to treat their own parts as property,* particularly their regenerative parts" (emphasis added). The extreme poverty of the seller, the critical

health of the buyer and the biomedical technologies that bring them together notwithstanding, the commodification of the organ cannot be complete without the same operative logic that goes into enabling wage-labour: each individual seller must learn to regard something internal to herself as a commodity.

Now, for labour-power to appear on the market as a commodity, says Marx, certain conditions had to be met. Under the capitalist mode of production, labour-power must be *for sale*. It cannot be *coercively* extracted from the labourer. On the contrary: under capitalism, labourers must become *free sellers* of their labour-power (*Capital I*, 875). Labour-power only appears as a freely sold commodity thanks to the end of feudalism, a historical phenomenon that Marx terms primitive accumulation. Once "he had ceased to be bound to the soil, and ceased to be the slave or serf of another person," the labourer could dispose of his own person (ibid). But the labourer is hardly free to do with his person what he chooses, for, expelled from the land on which he worked, he has been deprived of his means of existence. Robbed of the means of production, the labourer can sell merely his capacity to labour, the only thing he possesses. Marx's terminology to describe this transformation illustrates parallels between labour-power and the organ insofar as both commodities originate from a common human capacity or corporeality and are 'freely' made available only because there are scant alternatives. "These newly freed men," he says, "be[come] *sellers of themselves*" (ibid, emphasis added).

This last phrase invites us to criticise Marx on the grounds that he reduced man to labour-power: in the above citation, he effectively equates the sale of labour-power with the sale of oneself, suggesting that man is defined by his capacity to labour. This, in a sense, is the starting point of the criticism levelled at him by Hannah Arendt, as we shall see below. But it is also the source from which Hardt and Negri derive their vision of the multitude, to which I now turn.

"What we humans are at base," say Hardt and Negri in a claim that evidently draws on Marx, "is general possibility or general productive capacity" (153). It is on the basis of this conception of labour that they theorise the revolution to come, a revolution bred in and led by the multitude. Developed in response to Marx's notion of the working class, multitude refers to "all those who work under the rule of capital," granting "no political privilege to one kind of labour over another (106-7). Multitude differs from Marx's concept of the class struggle in that it is based "not so much on the current empirical existence of the [working] class, but rather on the conditions of its possibility. The question to ask, in other words, is not 'What is the multitude?' but rather 'What can the multitude become?'" (105). What this labouring multitude shows us, they claim, is that their labour is always in excess of capital's domain: "Living labour can be corralled by capital and pared down to the labour-power that is bought and sold and that produces commodities and capital, but *living labour always exceeds that*" (146, emphasis added).[6] It is in this double characteristic of labour, they claim, that we must seek the possibility of radical change. Labour creates value in the form commodities, they argue, but this value is taken away, appropriated. Herein lies the source of the labourer's antagonism. And yet, despite this exploitation, labour "retains its capacity to produce wealth, and this is its power" (153). For labour will always renew the conditions for its existence, and resurface.

Marx, too, remarked on the two-fold capacity of labour. In fact, Hardt and Negri's arguments, as they themselves declare, are based on his. Being the commodity from which all other commodities originate, Marx argued, labour-power possesses a special characteristic: [its] use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption is [...] hence a creation of value" (*Capital I*, 270). But labour-power is also a peculiar commodity in that it "exists only as a capacity of

[6] The term "living labour" is especially suggestive here, given that I am dealing with *live* donations.

the living individual. Its production consequently posits [the individual's] existence" (*Capital I*, 274). Like the organ then, labour-power is something which can be obtained only from a *living* individual.[7] Due to these peculiarities, then, the value of labour-power, too, is determined in an unconventional way: "Given the existence of the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. [...] In other words, the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner" (ibid).[8] We note that labour-power, unlike land, *is* produced: the production of labour-power effectively takes place with the *re*-production of the individual who labours to perpetuate his existence. It is in this strict sense, I submit, that the organ, too, is produced: unlike land, it requires the existence of a living being, whose labour it both maintains and is maintained by.

Marx's fundamental insight, however, is that labour-power "is not exhausted when its own reproduction has been secured" (Arendt, 88).[9] This is what permits the production – and subsequent appropriation – of surplus-value. For the labourer to produce surplus-value, he explains, an initial, objective condition must be met: "that [the labourer] *can* perform surplus labour: that natural conditions are such that a *part* of their labour-power is sufficient to reproduce and maintain them as producers; that the production of their necessary means of subsistence does not consume their entire

[7] This holds true even of cadaveric organs, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, must be procured from a person who is declared brain-dead, but considered alive insofar as life-support technology means that such an individual's heart continues to beat.

[8] It is for this reason that Marx speaks of land and labour-power in similar terms, declaring their price to be "irrational" (*Capital III*, 760). Unlike land, then, labour-power possesses value insofar as it is mediated by labour – labour-power cannot be (re)produced unless the wage-labourer labours in order to perpetuate his existence – but the *wage* he receives for this labour, or the *price* of his labour-power, is irrational insofar as it is overdetermined by a range of external factors. It is for this reason that Marx draws a parallel between land and labour-power while also underscoring the differences between the two: "[The price of land] is a category that is *prima facie* irrational, in the same way that the price of labour-power is irrational, *since the earth is not a product of labour*, and thus does not have a value" (ibid, emphasis added).

[9] Spivak's refers to this characteristic of the labouring subject as that which makes the subject "super-adequate to itself" (109).

labour-time" (*Capital III*, 773). The second, subjective condition, is that this potential be realised; thus, the labourer must actually be made to work for more time than is required to reproduce her own labour-power.

We recall that Hardt and Negri base their entire argument about the revolutionary potential of labour-power on just these two aspects of labour – the antagonistic and the inexhaustible – which Marx chooses to name subjective and objective. Unlike Hardt and Negri, however, Marx hardly attempts to theorise the possibilities of a revolution from this two-fold property of labour. He does not idealise labour as that which can never be exhausted by capital; rather, he makes the sobering point that it is due to this very objective property that exploitation is possible at all.[10] Nor does he enthuse about the fact that the capacity to labour is the one thing we possess in common, for he underscores, rather, how this capacity exists only insofar as the labourer continually struggles to retain ownership of it: "He must constantly treat his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and he can do this only by placing it at the disposal of the buyer, i.e., handing it over to the buyer for him to consume, *for a definite period of time, temporarily. In this way he manages to avoid renouncing his rights of ownership over it*" (271, emphasis added).

Here, the parallels between the organ and labour-power, too, cease. The organ, once parted with, is irredeemable. Unlike labour-power, it cannot be temporarily leased out and then re-claimed; its sale, once completed, must necessarily be a *one-time* sale. The figure who sells her organ, then, parts with something that is non-renewable, non-regenerative and decidedly exhaustible. It is at this point, then, that I see the need to depart from Marx. The organ-as-commodity requires us to understand humanity not, as Marx would have it, as that which is defined by its capacity to labour,

[10] To witness: "In political economy, *labour appears only in the form of wage-earning activity*" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Early Writings*, 289, emphasis added).

but as something which both includes this capacity, and, at the same time, *precedes* it. Labour-power might well exceed the predatory tendencies of capital. But, and here is the crucial difference, the organ does not. It is for this reason that Waldby and Mitchell suggest that:

> *a kidney seems to embody use-value itself*: if, as Marx noted in *The German Ideology*, use-values and exchange-values can only be produced when humans are 'in a position to live,' living itself requires the functioning body that supports this labour (174, emphasis added).

III Labour, again

I am hardly the first to suggest that we need to learn from Marx's method before parting ways with him insofar as capitalist society exists in a different form today. Of the many post-Marxists who advocate this strategy, I want to stay with Hardt and Negri, given that they specifically address the commodification of biological material. Hardt and Negri's own departure from Marx rests on their argument that, as of the late twentieth century, we live under the hegemony not of the industrial labour that Marx so cogently described, but of "immaterial labour" (108).[11] Immaterial labour can be described as such because, although the labour that goes into it remains material, as Hardt and Negri take pains to point out, what is immaterial is *its product* (109). Knowledge, information, communication, emotional responses and ideas are some of its most characteristically intangible products. Insofar as immaterial labour creates "relationships and ultimately social life itself," they argue, we can conceive of it as a form of "biopolitical labour" (ibid).

[11] Hardt and Negri clarify that immaterial labour is by no means hegemonic in quantitative terms; on the contrary, it "constitutes a minority of global labour" (109). Rather, immaterial labour is hegemonic in *qualitative* terms, imposing its tendency on all other forms of labour. They claim that immaterial labour occupies the same position today as did industrial labour 150 years ago, when it accounted only for a fraction of global production, but exerted its hegemony over all other forms of production (ibid).

Immaterial labour imposes a different mode of exploitation from the one Marx proposed; Hardt and Negri revise Marx's notion of exploitation which, as we saw above, is predicated upon the wage-labourer's sale of his labour-power for a specific length of time. Under the hegemony of immaterial labour, claim Hardt and Negri, such a calculation is impossible: "When production is aimed at solving a problem [...] or creating an idea or a relationship, work time tends to expand to the entire time of life" (111). One of the key aims of immaterial production is to produce cooperation and communication, to produce value *in common*. Thus, they argue, exploitation must be conceived as "the private appropriation of that which has been produced as common" (150). What does it mean to produce "in common," we might well ask? Significantly enough for my purposes here, Hardt and Negri choose to illustrate the paradigm of immaterial production with a specific example: the commercialisation of biological and natural material. To do this, they turn to a now canonical legal case in the history of biocapitalism: 1984's *Moore v. Regents of the University of California*.[12]

1976. John Moore, who suffers from hairy-cell leukemia, seeks treatment from Dr. Golde, a medical specialist at UCLA. Golde persuades Moore to allow him to surgically extract his spleen, which he does, as Moore's lawyers subsequently discovered, fully aware of the fact that Moore's spleen produced uncommonly large amounts of lymphokines. Lymphokines are proteins used by our immune system, of great use and interest to researchers, but extremely difficult to produce in large quantities. Golde proceeds to develop an immortal cell-line from Moore's spleen, effectively creating "a biological factory" for the production of lymphokines (Waldby and Mitchell, 88). In 1981, Moore's doctors establish a patent on the cell-line, listing

[12] This case has been examined by all thinkers with an interest in biotechnology. For a comprehensive bibliography see Priscilla Wald's "What's in a Cell?" *New Literary History*, Spring 2005. My own description of the case derives from Waldby and Mitchell's succinct account in *Tissue Economies*, 88-89.

Golde and his assistant as inventors. The cell-line is licensed to be used and re-produced by two pharmaceutical companies in exchange for stocks and cash valued at approximately three billion dollars (Hardt and Negri, 182). In 1984, Moore sues the University of California for ownership of the cell-line, but the California Supreme Court rules against him, on the grounds that the University of California rightfully owns the cell because lymphokites are a naturally occurring organism, and therefore not patentable (read *ownable*). The lymphokites, they reason, underwent human intervention before being developed into a cell-line; they were therefore transformed into a patentable product that was the result of human labour and ingenuity. Moore, therefore, cannot claim to own the cell-line developed from his own biological tissue.

Canonical as the Moore case is for exploring how the claim of property rights in one's own body can rapidly lead to the commodification of biological material for personal gain, this is not what interests Hardt and Negri.[13] Their concern is, firstly, to show that legal decisions such as the California Supreme Court's decision in the Moore case, "rest on a recognition of immaterial labour" (182), and thus provide further evidence of its hegemony. Secondly, they argue that the reign of immaterial labour results in a situation whereby "nature is ceasing to be common, [and] is becoming private property [...] exclusively controlled by its owners" (184). We might well observe that Marx already theorised such a transformation when he spoke of landed property and primitive accumulation. More misleading, however, is the referent behind that which Hardt and Negri somewhat confusingly call 'nature.' The term, as

[13] The conflicting opinion of the panel of judges shows that, for some of them, this was precisely what was at issue in Moore's claim. Drawing on the very narratives proclaiming the sanctity of the vessel that is the human body that I examined in chapter 1, one justice rationalised his decision to rule against Moore as follows: "Plaintiff has asked us to recognise and enforce a right to sell one's own body tissue *for profit*. He entreats us to regard the human vessel – the single most venerated and protected subject in any civilised society – as equal with the basest commercial commodity. He urges us to commingle the sacred with the profane. He asks much" (cited in Wald, 210). This same reasoning, of course, is also used to argue against organ commodification.

they employ it, refers to biological material that has been manipulated by labour.[14] *Common labour*, we recall. And so, under today's new mode of production, 'nature' is produced in common, to be privately appropriated. To summarise:

> In this entire field of immaterial production [...] the right or title to property is undercut by the same logic that supports it because the labour that creates property cannot be identified with any one individual or even group of individuals. Immaterial labour is increasingly a common activity characterised by continuous cooperation among innumerable individual producers. Who, for example, produces the information of genetic code? [...] [T]he information and knowledge is produced by human labour, experience and ingenuity, but in [no] case can that labour be isolated to an individual (187).

Concerned as I am with the case of the organ as commodity, I remain unconvinced by this argument. Granted, the labour of Golde and his assistants in creating a cell line from Moore's tissue may have been cooperative and common. But Hardt and Negri do not address what, to my mind, is the crucial question: are John Moore's lymphokites the product of *common* labour?

The concept of immaterial production, whether or not we believe in its analytical potential, is useful to my own purposes only insofar as it further underscores the particularities of the organ. The biological tissue that is the organ might well be produced and mediated by labour insofar as it both (re-)results from and (re-)enables labour. But this labour is hardly common in the sense that Hardt and Negri suggest. Moreover, the organ is not a *new* product; it is not, in brief, a newly created object that only exists in the world thanks to the intervention of human ingenuity and design, whether in common or individually. Nor, I would argue, are Moore's spleen and its lymphokites before they were developed into a cell-line. Exactly the opposite is true,

[14] Hardt and Negri place other immaterial products under this same category of 'nature', such knowledge about the medicinal properties of certain plants, or naturally occurring properties in certain plant varieties. As they point out, these properties and knowledges often occur in the global South, and are privately appropriated by pharmaceuticals in the North.

in fact. Both the organ and the lymphokites *precede* this capacity for human activity; this is precisely why the organ is so coveted by those who no longer possess a healthy one, and why Moore's rapidly-reproducing lymphokites proved so attractive to Golde.

My grounds for distinguishing between the human organ and the privately owned "life-forms" that Hardt and Negri discuss are, in effect, the same ones that Hannah Arendt uses to differentiate between earthly nature and the human world, or, between labour and work.[15] On her own admission, the distinction that Arendt proposes between labour and work is "unusual" (79). And yet, as I shall argue, when we consider Arendt's observations with biotechnological progress in mind, the distinction is well worth attending to. To understand Arendt's argument, we must shift our focus away from the idea of private property, and turn instead to propert*ies*, in the plural. Or to put it another way, to that which Hardt and Negri overlook: *the particular properties of a given produced object*.

Derived partly from Locke's differentiation between "the labour of our bodies and the work of our hands," Arendt's categories allow her both to ascribe a different sphere to each separate activity and to concentrate on the specific properties its final product (103-4). For, says Arendt, "the distinction between work and labour [...] indeed becomes a difference in degree if the worldly character of the produced thing – its location, function and length of stay in the world – is not taken into account" (94). It is just this "worldly character" of the organ that we must take into account.

[15] By life-forms, Hardt and Negri mean those biological beings which it is now possible to engineer. A case in point is OncoMouse, the mouse created by transplanting a human cancer-gene into it. Owned by DuPont laboratories, OncoMouse is owned not as an individual mourse but as a *type* of mouse. These newly created life-forms, produced in common, become private property precisely because of their newness. Although Hardt and Negri do not explicitly state this, their differentiation between OncoMouse and Holstein cow, an already-existing breed of cow which *cannot* be owned as a life-form, supports my claim (181).

“Labour,” argues Arendt, “is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body” (7). As such, it is associated not with the human world but with earthly nature. The crucial feature of labour, as Margaret Canovan points out, is that “it is the least free aspect of human activity” (74). Strictly speaking, Arendt defines labour as reproduction, both in the sense of procreation through the parturition with which it shares a name, and in the sense of perpetuating one’s own existence. It is an activity dictated by our biological needs, for labour, claims Arendt, “produces objects only incidentally, and is primarily concerned with the means of its own reproduction” (88, emphasis added). Labour is a cyclical activity, insofar as it is condemned to be repeated, producing only perishable objects meant for immediate consumption (ibid). Labouring forces each individual to concentrate only upon her own physical needs, leaving her “alone with [her] body, facing the naked necessity to keep [her]self alive” (212), and yet labour “assures not only individual survival but the survival of the species” (9). Labour, in other words, is that which brings humans together as a *biological species*. It is thus not concerned with human individuality and plurality: “as far as our bodily needs go, men [*sic*] are just interchangeable members of another animal species” (Canovan, 74). Labouring, in fact, is our link to the animal kingdom, insofar as animals, too, are compelled to satisfy their physical needs. It is for this reason, then, that throughout *The Human Condition*, Arendt refers to the labourer as the *animal laborans*.

Work, by contrast, “is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in [...] the species’ ever-recurring life-cycle” (Arendt, 7). It produces “an ‘artificial’ world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings” and is therefore associated not with nature but with the exclusively human world (ibid). Unlike the labourer, the worker constantly adds new objects to the human artifice with the aim of “bestow[ing] a measure of permanence

and durability upon the futility of mortal life" (Arendt, 8). Work corresponds to the activity of *fabrication*, creating a uniquely human world, a world of things "that are not consumed but *used*" (94, emphasis added). Work is the activity that provides stability for humans, sheltering us from a natural environment that is ever-changing.[16] It produces a world that is both "artificial and durable" and the objects it creates are "produced by transforming natural material" into that which can outlive us individual humans (Canovan, 108).[17] Given the uniquely human character of this activity of fabrication, Arendt refers to the worker as *homo faber*.

As Arendt takes care to point out, these two different activities result in products with differing phenomenological properties. "That is, the difference between work and labour is objective, rather than subjective" (Ring, 435). The products of labour, in contrast to those produced by work, are products needed for "the life process itself" (96). As such, they are products which, upon consumption, result only in the ability to keep producing: "Whatever labour produces is meant to be fed into the human life process almost immediately, and this consumption, regenerating the life process, produces – or rather, reproduces – new 'labour-power,' needed for the further sustenance of the body" (Arendt, 99). Ultimately, as Arendt says, regardless of the fact that it is not exhausted once it has secured its own reproduction, "labour never 'produces' anything but life" (88). The products of labour, furthermore, never quite lose their naturalness. Thus, "the grain never quite disappears in the bread as the tree has disappeared in the table" (103), and the bread is likely to decay and perish if left

---

[16] As Canovan explains, Arendt's view of nature owes little to Romanticism, which sees nature as far more stable and comforting than the artificiality and menace of urban settings. Rather, Arendt is indebted to the ancient Greeks, who saw nature as an endless cycle of life and death (107). For men to be properly human, then, they need a *world*, built to protect them from the "sublime indifference of an untouched nature, whose overwhelming elemental force [...] will compel them to swing relentlessly in the circle of their own biological movement" (Arendt, 137, cited in Canovan, 107).
[17] The culmination of work as an activity is the creation of works of art. I return to Arendt's comments on the work of art in chapter 5.

unconsumed for too long. In contrast, the table, the product of work, of the activity that introduces a new and durable object into the world, will endure in the world regardless of whether or not it is used.

It is because she is attentive to this objective difference between different products, and to the importance that the reproduction of biological, physical life has in the human condition, I contend, that Arendt is able to provide us with the tools to distinguish between the organ and the new life-forms discussed by Hardt and Negri. Granted, the language and examples that Arendt repeatedly uses to characterise the promptly consumed products of labour refer us back to one image: the consumption of food. Then why place the organ together with these other products of labour, in this, its Arendtian sense? Would we not thereby reproduce the troubling naturalistic rhetoric of transplantation surgeons? We can easily counter this objection by repeating Waldby and Mitchell's attempt to signal to the very process that Arendt alludes to: healthy organs seem to "embody use-value itself." With Arendt's terminology, however, we might rearticulate their observation differently: organs are the product of labour and not work because they (re)produce life itself. And the new life forms and cell lines analysed by Hardt and Negri? These, Arendt's categories show, are the products of work, specifically designed with the aim of bringing a new object into the world, and meant not to be consumed but to further our understanding of natural processes, a point I return to below.

It is also on the basis of the distinction between work and labour that Arendt launches her now (in)famous critique of Marx. I do not wish to become entangled in the heated debates as to whether or not her critique is justified. If I briefly summarise the kernel of Arendt's objections to Marx here, this is because the same logic informs her critique of the achievements, goals and methodologies of science and technology, a topic much more relevant to my own concerns. Indeed, Margaret Canovan, perhaps

the most well-known of Arendt scholars, goes as far as to speculate that "[i]f Arendt had lived to see the development of biotechnology, it would have no doubt confirmed her fears" (84, fn 78).

While much admiring Marx's observation that labour-power's productivity is the very thing that caused the alienation of the labourer, whose generative, productive capacity was privately appropriated by the capitalist, Arendt takes issue with his failure to attend to what she perceives to be crucial: the phenomenological difference between the different products humans can create. Eliding the difference between products for mere consumption and those "durable enough to be accumulated", she claims, effectively means that "all things [are] understood, not in their worldly, objective quality, but as results of living labour-power and functions of the life-process" (89). This, says Arendt, culminates in our alienation from the *human* world, and subordinates all humans to processes of merely biological and animal necessity, tying them to the endless cycle of production and consumption that she calls the "life process" (116). Marx's belief that humans are defined by their capacity to labour, and his subsequent inability to distinguish between work and labour, then, mean that he privileges productivity over durability, and labour over work. In other words, Marx glorifies the activity that "progress[es] automatically in accordance with life itself and outside the range of wilful decisions or humanly meaningful purposes" (106).[18] If this glorification of labour is where she locates the totalitarian elements in Marx, it is in his attempt to imagine an unalienated labour that would be productive *beyond* the realm of necessity that she locates his utopian elements:

---

[18] Arendt also claims that in the contemporary world, the production process has become fully permeated by the character of labour. Thus, work still produces use-objects, but it does so in such large quantities that they begin to operate as objects of consumption: "or [...], to put it another way, the rate of use is so tremendously accelerated that the objective difference between use and consumption, between the relative durability of use objects and the swift coming and going of consumer goods, dwindles to insignificance" (125).

> The hope that inspired Marx and the best men of the various workers' movements – that free time will emancipate men from necessity and make the *animal laborans* productive – rests on the illusion of a mechanistic philosophy which assumes that labour power, like any other energy, can never be lost, so that if it is not spent and exhausted in the drudgery of life, it will automatically nourish other, 'higher' activities. [...] A hundred years after Marx we know the fallacy of this reasoning; the spare time of the *animal laborans* is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites. That these appetites become more sophisticated, so that consumption is no longer restricted to necessities, but on the contrary, concentrates on the superfluities of life, does not change the character of this society, but harbours the grave danger that eventually no object of the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption (133).[19]

We can now examine how Arendt wields these same categories in order to analyse modern society and the growing role that science and technology play in it. Writing as she was in the wake of nuclear technology, Arendt notes that the "enormously increased human power of destruction" is no less overwhelming than a corresponding growth in the "new creative power" that science has awakened, a power that allows us "to produce new elements never found in nature" (269). Her focus, however, is not on the private expropriation of what Hardt and Negri hold to be commonly produced "new life forms." Neither private appropriation nor production-in-common are at issue here. Rather, Arendt is concerned to show how technological developments have resulted in a process whereby sheer biological life has become the highest good, the goal for which to strive. Once again, in other words, the sphere of labour has triumphed over that of work.

In the early days of empirical science, Arendt argues, work gained considerable standing. "It was an instrument, the telescope, a work of man's hands,

[19] This citation also shows, as Canovan puts it, that Arendt uses the category of labour to refer both to the biological necessities imposed by nature, and to the "pseudo-natural processes of society within which we are all engaged in making a living" (127).

which finally forced nature, or rather, the universe to yield its secrets," she observes (290). Work continued to be ever more valorised due to the high degree of "making and fabricating present in the experiment itself" (295). The experiment, however, was increasingly used to *repeat* natural processes, rather than to merely *observe* them. The emphasis that work places on the durability of its product, was thus increasingly eroded, as scientific enquiry became increasingly concerned with "the question of how and through which means and processes [a given natural process or natural product] had come into being and could be *reproduced*" (304, emphasis added).

The dwindling importance of work, says Arendt, means that science has begun acting *into* nature, "creating 'natural' processes which without men would never exist, and which earthly nature by herself seems incapable of accomplishing" (231). And this newfound ability to reproduce nature brings us back to the sphere of labour, which, we recall, has reproduction as its sole aim. For science may well make use of the instruments of *homo faber* in order to achieve its task; it may even create new products in the process of acting into nature, but should this happen, it is as incidental as is labour's ability to produce more than it strictly requires. Incidental, because labour is concerned only with reproducing itself and the conditions of its possibility, its ability to produce more than what is strictly necessary for this notwithstanding.

These same patterns, Arendt claims, are at work in modern science. More important than the incidental production of a new object, Arendt argues, is the ability to produce *knowledge* as to the process through which a natural process can be created anew, reproduced. While this position might find echoes in Hardt and Negri's concept of immaterial labour, I believe it is more instructive to read Arendt's comments as a diagnosis of how work is increasingly replaced by a process that conceives of humanity only in terms of its biological species-being. In view of her comments, we can interpret the creation of the Moore cell-line as an intervention into nature that

ensured the creation of a cell-line that was infinitely *reproducible*. If the California Supreme Court rewarded Moore's doctors with a patent for their work, for the ingenuity of their fabrication, this is only because the legal sphere adheres to the "current prejudice which ascribes the development of modern science, because of its applicability, to a pragmatic desire to improve conditions and better human life on earth" (Arendt, 289). This legal precedent and this prejudice, Arendt might argue, testify to the victory of the *animal laborans* over the *homo faber*, and show that the sheer preservation of biological life now becomes our supreme goal: "the interests of the individual as well as the interests of mankind are always equated with individual life or the life of the species *as though it were a matter of course that life is the highest good*" (312, emphasis added).

Similarly, the process thanks to which the organ is increasingly commodifiable emerges as a triumph of our ability to act into nature. Immunosuppressant drugs have effectively designed a way in which to reproduce the natural process of immunological tolerance, even as this means, as Lawrence Cohen puts it, that biological difference is actively suppressed. In fact, Cohen's reading of immunosuppression ties directly into Arendt's argument, for it is a technique designed, she might argue, to suppress human plurality and bring out our biological commonality. And what logic other than the one which sees "life as the highest good" is at work in those calls for organ markets, which begin their appeals with figures of death tolls in organ waiting lists, and claim, as does Fox and Swazey's anonymous advocate whose pithy words I find myself forced to return to time and again, that commercialisation "is helpful, rather than harmful, to people's *well-being*" (71, emphasis added).

I am not, of course, suggesting that the life of those who die waiting for a transplant is unimportant. However, I wish to underscore here that the cultivation of

life that Arendt signals to can only be an obsession with those who can, quite literally, afford the biotechnologies that enable it. To this political and economical problem I shall turn in subsequent chapters. Nor do I wish to imply that we should adopt Arendt's sombre outlook and view the perpetuation of biological life as a goal that is as arrogant and hubris-ridden as it is oblivious to our human capabilities. Rather, I contend that just as Marx sheds light on just what kind of product the organ-as-commodity is, Arendt allows us to grasp why biotechnology's products, both potential and actual, provoke such heated debates, and such contrasting reactions. For, is not the fear that biotechnology might inaugurate a new form of eugenics, or that the legal commercialisation of organs will legitimise the consumption of humans really a fear that human beings will be increasingly treated as though they were no more than animals? And, is not the hope that biotechnology will save ever more lives, or the celebration of the fact that organ transplants can now occur across immunological and racial lines an attempt to help us see that we are all animals-in-common?

"The point, in our context," as Arendt announced fifty years ago, "is that both despair and triumph are inherent in the same event" (262). It is to these two emotions as articulated in different geopolitical, economic and, indeed, textual contexts that I shall now turn.

Chapter 2

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND DANGEROUS FANTASIES: MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S *HARVEST*

I. Alchemic dreams in the new millennium

In June of 1995, Indian writer Manjula Padmanabhan decided to write a play in response to an announcement advertising the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation International Competition. The evaluating committee was looking for "a new, original, unproduced, unpublished play" dealing with "the problems facing Man on the threshold of the 21st century" (Padmanabhan 1998, 105). The ensuing play, a futuristic dystopia set in Bombay, was completed and submitted one year later. Entitled *Harvest* (1996), the piece went on to win first prize and subsequently premiered, in Greek, at the Karolous Koun Theatre, Athens in 1999.

Knowing that Padmanabhan won a competition with such a weighty and daunting rubric, makes it hard not to approach *Harvest* with, at best, keen curiosity, or, at worst, high expectations of Padmanabhan's personal diagnosis of where Man's most urgent difficulties lie in this century. The postcolonially minded, however, will no doubt be heartened to discover that Padmanabhan won the Onassis International Competition with a play offering a staunch critique of the effects that globalisation and its concomitant new biomedical and digital technologies have on the third world. And yet, they might well stall at the fact that Padmanabhan should choose to launch her postcolonial critique through a genre rarely employed in drama, let alone in postcolonial studies: science-fiction.[1] The goal of this chapter is to provide a reading

[1] There is one anthology of postcolonial science fiction, *So Long Being Dreaming*, but no substantial critical studies of the genre. The little scholarship that does exist has been dedicated to Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome.* Studies of science fiction, especially those with a historical approach to the genre, increasingly pay attention to both race and empire. For the former concern, however, they read

of *Harvest* that neither diminishes the play's contribution to postcolonial studies in this, the era of globalization, nor overlooks Padmanabhan's critical use of the conventions of drama and science-fiction within which she has deliberately chosen to work.

Bombay, 2010. Om, an unemployed Indian man comes back home to his wife Jaya, and his mother, Ma. Om announces to them that he has been selected for a "job" with Interplanta Services, a multinational corporation which buys the rights to third-world citizens' body parts in exchange for a radical improvement in the seller's living conditions. Om's family soon learns that the purchaser of the rights to Om's body parts is Ginni, an American woman who repeatedly appears in their house thanks to what Padmanabhan calls a "Contact-Module," a high-tech gadget placed in Om's house ostensibly to enable communication between the third-world organ donor and the first-world organ recipient. The Contact-Module, however, serves simultaneously as a screen, communication device and monitoring system that allows Ginni to police Om and his family without requiring her physical presence in their home. Her frequent, unannounced "visits" to Om's house allow her to observe his family's diet and toilet habits, and she wastes no time in policing their daily routine to ensure it conforms to her personal standards of hygiene. When the fateful day of Om's transplant operation(s) finally arrives, he cowers in fright, and allows Interplanta's employees to take away his brother Jeetu – a male prostitute who is secretly Jaya's lover – instead. This supposed accident, however, is actually part of a larger scheme. Ginni, in fact, was never a real person, but a computer-generated image created by Virgil, the real, *male* receiver who uses Jeetu's body parts in order to rebuild his own

---

the contemporary works of African-American writers such as Butler and Delany. For the latter, they discuss authors writing during imperialism's heydey (Verne, Wells, Haggard).

deteriorated body. All along, it transpires, Virgil's plan has been to use Jeetu's body to seduce Jaya into contracting out her own body. Virgil wants to artificially inseminate Jaya and keep the baby as his own.

As this brief plot summary makes clear, *Harvest* identifies the illegal trade in human organs as one of many forms of exploitation that arise with the proliferation of new digital and biomedical technologies under late capitalism. Like other prominent works of its genre, *Harvest* seems to suggest that "progress is indissoluble from catastrophe" (Suvin, cited in Roberts, 44).[2] Yet the polarized world that *Harvest* envisions, a world divided into third-world Donors and first-world Receivers, tailors this characteristic trope of the genre to locate the "catastrophe of progress" in the *third-world*. Through its resolutely postcolonial setting, the play explores how the promises of improved communication, ameliorated health and increased lifestyle choices contained in these new technologies undergo a sinister transformation in the third-world, where "access to these technologies does not [necessarily] correspond with access to the knowledge that produces or controls them" (Mathur, 2004, 128).

The author's note with which the playscript opens sets the tone for what follows: a work of science-fiction with a dogged focus on the third-world subject's relationship to scientific and technological advances.

> The year is 2010. There are significant technical advances, but the clothes and habits of ordinary people in the 'Donor' World are no different to those of Third World citizens today. Except for the obviously exotic gadgets described in the action, household objects look reasonably familiar (217)

[2] Suvin makes this observation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which according to some, inaugurated the genre of science-fiction (Alkon, 1994). Others, however, view Shelley's gothic novel as belonging to a tradition of "anti-science-fiction" (Stableford, 2003).

The "significant technical advances" of 2010 serve to situate *Harvest* within the constraints of science-fiction and create the "cognitive estrangement" that Darko Suvin has argued is the defining characteristic of genre.[3] Yet, as Suchitra Mathur points out, the process of cognitive estrangement is somewhat curbed with a qualifying "but" that informs us that people of the Donor World look no different from what we know them to look like today. No such qualification is made for people of the Receiver World, however. We can thereby anticipate that if we are to be cognitively estranged, it will be, like the Donor characters themselves, from the *Receivers* of the first-world. As Mathur notes, "foregrounding the similarity between the present and future third-world," allows Padmanabhan to "reduc[e] the science-fictional cognitive distance for a specific part of the globe" (Mathur, 127). Thus, before the action of the play even commences, Padmanabhan establishes that the "technical advances" we are about to witness are not global, but confined to first-world locations. Regardless of our own location then, Padmanabhan forges, from the play's outset, a bond between us and the Donors, uniting us in our cognitive estrangement from the Receivers' world.

As she tells us in her essay "The Story of *Harvest*", Padmanabhan first conceived of the idea for the play during a visit to her sister in Madras in early 1995. On a morning walk around the town, she saw several men "wearing pajamas, dressing gowns and sterile gauze mouth-masks." Upon make enquiries, she was told that the

[3] Suvin has famously defined science-fiction as "a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin, 1988, 37). As Roberts explains, the rational and logical implications of the term "cognition" allow Suvin to refer to those aspects of science-fiction which invite us to try and grasp the unfamiliar environment of a given text of science-fiction. "Estrangement" is a term Suvin derives from Brecht in order to allude to the elements of science-fiction that alienate us from the familiar and the everyday (Roberts, 8)

men were "clients of the flourishing trade [in human organs] whose source was the poor villagers of Tamil Nadu" recovering from kidney-transplant surgery (106). "The germ of the idea," Padmanabhan continues, "was that of the poor becoming donors to the rich, into which I found I could insert the classic theme of age cannibalizing youth in quest of longevity" (ibid).[4]

I choose to dwell on Padmanabhan's creative thought-process here because I find it suggestive that she should make sense of the sinister image of the Indian kidney-sellers she encountered in Madras by not only aligning it to humanity's mythical, legendary and age-old search for immortality, but by introducing a predatory dimension into this quest. More suggestive still is the fact that the play that ensued from this thought-process locates the classic theme of the pursuit of immortality in a first-world whose inhabitants are sick but technologically resourceful, dying but refusing to let go of life, willing victims all of "the hubris of medicine and medical technology in the face of mortality" (Scheper-Hughes, 2000, 198).

Padmanabhan is hardly alone in associating the trade in live human organs with the predatory drive to infinitely prolong one's own life with the organs of others. Medical anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes has not only described the global black market in human organs as a form of "new cannibalism" (1998, 14-17) but has argued that advances in transplant surgery create "an artificial need, one that can never be satisfied", to cater for "the age-old denial and refusal of death" (2000, 198). Several

[4] I contend that these remarks should serve as a salutary reminder against reading *Harvest* as a metaphor for neocolonialism. This, for instance, is Ayesha Ramachandran's reading. The abstract for her article on *Harvest* describes the play as "explor[ing] the extreme outcome of the international trade in human organs as a metaphor for neocolonialism" (161). Seeing *Harvest* as a metaphor for the evils of neocolonialism ignores the fact that the idea for the play sprang from Padmanabhan's encounter with the harsh realities of the illegal traffic in human organs. More problematically, this interpretation subsumes the target of Padmanabhan's critical gaze under the broad rubric of "neocolonialism", reducing the specificity of Padmanabhan's critique, while simultaneously giving the erroneous impression that neocolonialism itself is a monolithic process.

sociologists of medicine and historians of science point to the dream of an endlessly regenerative body to which advances in biotechnology have given rise:

> Biotechnology promises the greatest profits and the greatest potential for the extension of life […] feed[ing] the dream of a completely regenerative biology. By this fantasy, the aging body could partake of the embryonic vitality of the very young body, indefinitely reproducing itself, even if only in a state of suspended animation (Nielson, 181)

Such a view, Robbie Davis-Floyd points out, relies on an increasingly pervasive, *technocratic* view of medicine, which not only defines the body as a machine whose malfunctioning parts can be replaced with used "spare" ones, but feeds the fantasy of a "technological progress that will culminate in [the] transcendence of all natural bounds" (260).

As mentioned, Padmanabhan situates this technocratic society fantasizing with endless regeneration in the first-world, and epitomizes it in the character of Virgil, who, by the end of the play, proudly proclaims that this is "his fourth body in fifty years" (246). The action of the play, however, occurs entirely in a third-world whose inhabitants are figured as the preyed-upon owners of the spare body parts so coveted by their first-world counterparts. My contention is that this deliberate move on Padmanabhan's part forces us to view biotechnological advances from the point of view of those third-world inhabitants who cannot buy into the technocratic dream of life-prolongation because they lack the wealth to do so. *Harvest* thereby places the dreams generated by biotechnology on a continuum with global capitalism: it is economic necessity that drives the impoverished third-world Donors to quasi-literally feed the technocratic dream that only the first-world Receiver can afford to dream.[5]

[5] It is hardly an accident, moreover, that *Harvest* represents the organs trade as a fully institutionalised service industry which, like any other, smoothly operates under the control of an entity that embodies all the rapacious forces of global capitalism: the transnational corporation.

This last claim is slightly misleading, however. I do not mean to suggest that *Harvest* reduces its third-world Donors to the passive victims of first-world capital. What makes the play so compelling, in fact, is its simultaneous attentiveness to the futures that the third-world Donors dream of: with the notable exception of Om's wife, Jaya, all members of the Donor family view Om's contract as an opportunity to actively harness the forces of a capitalism that lures them with seductive promises of unprecedented wealth and unheard-of comforts. The plays thus invites us to examine not just the material economic inequalities created by global capitalism but also the transformations in the *social imaginaries* of those third-world inhabitants whom economic prosperity continues to elude.

Let me explain this transformation by turning to Jean and John Comaroff. Global capitalism today, the Comaroffs argue, presents itself to the labouring poor in a millennial, messianic form. Advertising itself as a "gospel of salvation; [as] a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalised and the disempowered" (292), millennial capitalism lures its targets with business proposals whose "alchemic techniques defy reason in promising unnaturally large profits" (313).[6]

Harvest situates Om's decision to embark on the sale of his body parts within this millennial context. Organ trade is no longer a criminalised activity in the futuristic Bombay he inhabits, but this only makes the promises of millennial capitalism seem all the more alluring. "We'll have more money than you and I have names for! Who'd believe there's so much money in the world?" he says to his mother ecstatically (219).

---

[6] The analogy with alchemy is particularly suggestive in the framework created by *Harvest*. The two most noteworthy pursuits of medieval alchemy – the search for immortality and the drive to transmute common metals into gold or silver – mirror Virgil's dream of acquiring an endlessly regenerative body through biotechnology and the Donor family's dream of accruing endless wealth through selling body-parts, respectively.

Om's decision is brought on by that set of contradictory emotions, hope and despair, that millennial capitalism and its predatory economies unleash upon its targets. His defensive retort to Jaya when she expresses her reservations for what he has done is plagued by these conflicting emotions:

> You think I did it lightly. But […] we'll be *rich*! Very rich! Insanely rich! But you'd rather live in this one small room, I suppose! Think it's such a fine thing – living day in, day out, like monkeys in a hot-case – lulled to sleep by our neighbours' rhythmic farting! […] And starving. (223).

Immiserated, poor and hopelessly excluded from capitalism's promise of global prosperity, why, Om reasons, should he not cash in on his healthy body? Herein lies the hope extended by this new economy: a quick fix to his condition by presenting a new, quasi-magical means of making undreamt of amounts of money.

Making money. This is the promise that the occult economy of organ trade extends to its objects: sell your organ and you will *make* more money than you will ever *earn* through years of toil and labour. Padmanabhan uses Ma to depict the extent to which the organs economy presents itself as a miraculous option. Puzzled by her son's promises of unimaginable riches, Ma probes Om to understand just what kind of contract he has entered into with Interplanta: "What kind of job pays a man to sit at home?" she asks, quite sensibly (220). By scene two of the play, however, Ma has grasped what Om's new "job" entails and her queries are no longer anxious, but incredulous, as though she cannot believe their good fortune: "Tell me again: all you have to do is sit at home and stay healthy? […] And they'll pay you? […] Even if you do nothing but sit at home and pick your nose all day?" (222).

II. Buying donors

By Act II of the play, Ma has abandoned all apprehension and become completely captivated by their new life of opulence. When the curtain rises for the second act, Padmanabhan's stage directions tell us, two months have elapsed, and the main room of the family household is littered with an array of high-tech, if recognisable, gadgets that Ginni has provided them with in order to entertain them and keep them comfortable: "TV set, computer terminal, mini-gym, an air-conditioner, the works," (227). Designed to pamper the body, and provide it with entertainment and comfort, these devices lure Ma into recklessly enjoying a lifestyle that was hitherto unavailable to them: the life of unrestrained consumption that late capitalism advertises. Addicted to the endless soap operas and commercials now available to her via cable television, Ma is the perfect recipient of Ginni's gifts, completely surrendered as she is to the joys of technologically-induced bliss and thrilled that, for literally performing no labour at all, "they will be rich forever and ever" (235).

Ma's unresisting acceptance of the sudden transformation in her living conditions serves to underscore how the pull that millennial capitalism exerts on the third-world citizen is exacerbated when it pairs up with new technologies. As Suchitra Mathur points out, *Harvest* accurately depicts the ability that first-world technology has to "arouse *desire* in the Other" (126, emphasis added).[7] In the case of Ma, desire is figured in escapist terms. Using her unlimited access to Interplanta's bank account to purchase a futuristic device Padmanabhan calls a VideoCouch, by the end of the play

[7] Mathur's article is concerned mainly with science and technology as they are represented in South Asian science-fiction. The literary texts he analyses together with *Harvest* – Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's feminist utopia "Sultana's Dream" and Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* – are all meditations on the role of science and technology in the colonial or postcolonial world. Thus, while I cite Mathur's comment in general agreement, I contend that in the case of *Harvest*, technology must be understood as indissociable from global capitalism in its millennial form.

Ma is locked away in a capsule into which she can plug in and uninterruptedly watch one of 150 television channels without getting up to eat, drink or go to the toilet because, as the agent who comes to install it tells us, “the unit is fully self-sufficient” (244). Ma thus opts to use her new-found wealth to purchase a one-way ticket to armchair travel and virtual transportation: having transcended the physical limitations imposed by her aged body and its material needs, she can now be a cyborg TV-tourist, globe-trotting for ever.

Much has been written about the cyborg in the last decade, but Donna Haraway’s influential “Cyborg Manifesto” (1991) remains the most celebratory account of the liberational potential of the cybernetically enhanced organism. Half human and half machine, the cyborg, as we saw in chapter 1, poses a much-needed challenge to the dualisms that Western discourses persistently use to further domination over “women, people of colour, nature, workers [and] animals” (177). The cyborg exposes not only the permeability of these categories but serves as an existing example that such dualisms are constructions that can be destabilised.

Utopian postmodernism at its best maybe, but postcolonial criticism “The Cyborg Manifesto” is not. Haraway’s exhilaration with the cyborg remains circumscribed within a privileged first-world vantage point that overlooks the predicament of those with limited access to new technologies. To her credit, Haraway is not entirely blind to her privileged position. She recognises that her gesture to reclaim the cyborg as a being that promises to forge new relationships between humanity, technology and nature (Graham, 309) is ironic given that “the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the ‘West’s’ escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency” (151). Yet her manifesto remains resolutely utopian, and she does little to unpack the liberational

potential, if any, that the cyborg offers to those who have no say in the uses to which technology is put.

Which brings us back to *Harvest*, and our venture into the murky postcolonial territory that Haraway manages to dodge. Underscoring the sinister underside of the cyborg that Haraway herself acknowledges, *Harvest* warns us that the cyborg needs to be critically examined before we universally acclaim its revolutionary potential. Padmanabhan thus stages a third-world space in which the only person to actively seek out a cyborg existence is the first-world inhabitant who visits it. The Donors, on the other hand, bow to technology and cyborg existence not because they exert any control on its implementation but because they are conscripted to do so. If Ma does not fit into this paradigm, this hardly suggests any wavering on Padmanabhan's part. Ma willingly chooses her cyborg fate, yes, but this only allows Padmanabhan to show that technology can also lead to *disempowerment*: the VideoCouch effectively transforms Ma into an unquestioning, docile and submissive being who has lost all critical capacity for interrogating the price that her two sons have had to pay to enable the purchase of her gadget.

While Ma lies oblivious in her VideoCouch, both her sons abandon Jaya, seeking out the sensual treats that Receiver Ginni tempts them with through the Contact Module. Ironic this, given that Jaya has hitherto been the primary cause of sibling rivalry, with Jeetu winning out as the illicit recipient of his sister-in-law's affections. The siblings now vie for the attentions of Ginni, caring little that the carnal pleasures she promises can only be enjoyed by willingly embracing a cyborg existence. If Om and Jeetu depart for their cyborg fates, as they do, voluntarily, surely we are hardly justified in accusing Ginni of coercion? This, however, is precisely what I intend to do.

I base my claim, for now, not on the fact that Ginni is actually a computer-generated image – a point I discuss at length below – but on Padmanabhan's repeated and astute references to the thorny question of choice, an issue which persists despite the fact that the play is set in a world where all judicial, moral and bioethical debates generated by biomedical technologies have been overcome. In this future, the utilitarian and neo-liberal principles espoused by advocates of a free market in human tissue have triumphed, and the human body is accordingly viewed as a form of property like any other, fit for disposal as its free and autonomous owner deems suitable. The futuristic setting allows for a plot that centres around a freely-entered, legal contractual agreement between a first and third-world citizen. Yet *Harvest* propounds this victorious logic while simultaneously offering it up for interrogation.

Act II, scene iv. Jaya accuses her husband of making the wrong decision by selling the rights to his body to Interplanta. Om, however, is adamant that, though voluntary, the decision was not made of his own free will:

> Om: Wanting – not wanting – what meaning do these words have? Was it my choice that I signed up for this program?
> Jaya: Who forced you? You went of your own accord!
> Om: I went because I lost my job at the company. And why did I lose it? Because I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks anymore! There are no new jobs now – there's nothing *left* for people like us! Don't you know that?
> Jaya: You're wrong, there are choices – there must be choices –
> Om: Huh! I didn't choose. I stood in queue and was chosen! And if not this queue, there would have been other queues – […]. (238)

The world *Harvest* conjures is not so transformed as to have overcome the profound economic inequalities created by global capitalism. A world of transformed ethical values this may indeed be, but – we do well to recall the unchanged physical appearance and living conditions of the third-world citizens of the future here – the economic structures of late capitalism remain much the same as they are today. By

underscoring the precarious conditions under which the Donors live, the desperate measures Om takes in order to secure an income emerge as all but free and autonomous choices.[8]

"There are no new *jobs* now," claims the unemployed Om. Indeed not. His comment unwittingly pinpoints to the ominous lack of terms available to describe the contract he has signed with Interplanta. Whatever else it may be, Om's is certainly no conventional employment contract. And it is certainly no coincidence that Jeetu, the prostitute, is the only one to realise this. He attempts to convey it to Jaya in a scene that sees the only private encounter between the two lovers. As a prostitute, Jeetu is accustomed to providing sexual pleasure for those "with money to spare on services such as [his]" (226). What right does Om have, he asks, to shun him for his supposedly seedy profession? "At least when I sell my body, I decide which part of me goes into where and whom," he tells Jaya (227). Not only does Jeetu retain some degree of choice in his job; he is actually justified in describing it as such: "I don't mind being bought – but I won't be *owned*!" he claims (ibid). Jeetu succinctly expresses a materialist understanding of the subtle but crucial difference between the two distinct commodities being considered here: Jeetu's clients buy from him the sexual favours that Jeetu chooses to place at their disposal in the form of a temporary, alienable service that he performs; his brother's client, by contrast, permanently owns the entirety of Om's physical body along with Om's rights over it. Om's is no employment contract; it is a contract whose terms transform his whole body, along with the labour and services it is capable of performing, into a commodity that is now

[8] Nancy Scheper-Hughes makes a similar point about the idea of free choice: "Bioethical arguments about the right to sell [one's organs] are based on Euro-American notions of contract and individual 'choice.' But social and economic contexts make the 'choice' to sell a kidney in an urban slum anything but a 'free' and 'autonomous' one" (2001 n.p.).

owned by someone else.[9] Nor, we might add, is Om's a typical contract of the sort we might encounter on the black market for organs. This latter kind of sale, even according to legalisation advocates, we recall from the previous chapter, is explicitly predicated upon our *not* conceiving of another's body as property, and upon one's own entitlement to see only *parts* of one's own body as property.

Om, not Jeetu, then, is the man to make a "profession" out of selling his own body. *Selling*, we note. Why then, we are now forced to ask ourselves, does Padmanabhan insist on referring to all her third-world characters as *donors*? Whether potential "employees" of Interplanta, like the rest of Om's family and the competitors he encounters during the selection process, or actual contract holders, like Om, *Harvest*'s third-world protagonists can hardly be described as altruistic donors who willingly give up their bodies to save the lives of the sick. Not donors then but sellers, a sinister group of new merchants who seek remuneration for the act of turning their bodies into purchasable commodities.

And yet I argue that Padmanabhan's signifier is astutely and aptly chosen. I should like to refer my reader back, here, to the deliberately oxymoronic heading of this section: "buying donors." Sellers maybe, but donors cannot surely, by definition, be *bought*? But contemporary definitions are no longer valid in *Harvest*'s futuristic world. The new technologies that only *Harvest*'s first-world Receivers can afford are used to *transform* the third-world citizen, once an apprehensive seller, into a willing donor. We must read Padmanabhan's use of the term "donor", I contend, as alluding to just this process of transformation-through-technology. By the end of the play, we

---

[9] The difference between Om and Jeetu's contracts is also articulated in Marx's explanation of the employment contract. "[T]he proprietor of labour-power must always sell it for a limited period only, for if he were to sell it in a lump, once and for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity" (*Capital I*, 271).

recall, Om and Jeetu insist on leaving their house to find Ginni and compete for the honour of gifting their bodies to her so she can ply them for all her needs. All their initial misgivings forgotten, they become consummate donors, both of them responding to Ginni's call to undergo an act for which, she insists, one would "have to be *really willing*..." (240, emphasis added). If I insist on inserting an economic dimension into the brothers' change of heart, it is because the polarised framework of *Harvest* urges us to do so. In this play where new technologies are repeatedly shown to be wielded and controlled by the first-world Receiver, we cannot forget that Ginni creates a donor mentality in Om and Jeetu only because she is first able to purchase the technologies that will allow her to do so.

Ginni, of course, is actually Virgil in disguise. In all the initial contacts that he makes with Om's family, the true Receiver, Virgil, appears to them as Ginni, "the blonde and white-skinned epitome of an American-style youth goddess" (217). The gender-bending that Virgil's technological prowess permits, however, emerges here not as a celebration of cyberspace for its potential to release us all from the binding markers that confine us to one rigid identity, but as a sobering warning of the coercive uses to which such identity-bending can be put. We are far removed from extolments of the cyborg here. *Harvest*'s cyborg is manipulative, duplicitous. Disguised as Ginni, the cyborg *seduces* Om and Jeetu into becoming donors, deceives them into thinking that she will bestow countless sexual favours upon them in her infinite gratitude.

Let us recall, once more, Suchitra Mathur's observation that *Harvest* depicts first-world technology's ability to "arouse *desire* in the Other." Nowhere is the crucial role that the arousal of desire plays in the creation of a willing donor more vividly illustrated than in the transformation undergone by Jeetu. Claiming that he much prefers to continue earning his own living as a prostitute rather than partake of his

family's newfound fortunes, Jeetu initially chooses to dwell in the street, away from the household comforts which the rest of the family now enjoys. Jeetu is nevertheless forced to seek out his family's help when he falls ill. Lice-infested and clothed in rags, he swallows his pride and knocks on their door. He is cared for by Jaya, who tends to him despite Om and Ma's displeasure. Jeetu is still in the house on the fateful day that Ginni sends the guards of Interplanta Services to fetch Om for his first transplant. While Om hides in their new toilet cubicle in fright, the guards seize Jeetu, inject him with a numbing anaesthetic so he will stop resisting them and take him away for surgery. The man who showed such contempt for his brother's actions thus becomes a participant in Virgil's plan, albeit through an act of invasive technological violence.

Jeetu returns that very night, changed. In the place where his eyes used to be, sit two "enormous goggles, created to look like a pair of imitation eyes" (238). Miserable and humiliated, Jeetu curses Ginni: "A rich woman who plucks a poor man's eyes out of his body – huh! That's not a woman, it's a demon!" (239). Hitting his replacement eyes with his fists, he shudders in fright at what the visions they afford: bright white shapes and confused outlines that he cannot even turn off. "I can't sleep, I can't dream, I can't even cry" he tells his family, who want him to accept his accidental cyborg fate for the sake of the comforts they are receiving in return. "Is it selfish to want to end this?" he asks (239).

As soon as the Contact Module next flickers to life, however, Jeetu radically changes his tune. Circling round the room looking at something that none of his family can see, he speaks only to Ginni, awed by her beauty and the lushness of her surroundings. His new eyes allow him to access an image that Ginni beams "straight into [his] mind" so that he can now see her in a full-bodied form that appears to be standing right next to him (240). As Helen Glibert points out, the Receiver's

technology fools Jeetu "into thinking that the normal practices of social (and sexual) interaction can operate in this virtual world" (2006 129). Now moving his own body as seductively as he can, Jeetu promises Ginni that he will do whatever she wants of him. Repeatedly and flirtatiously referring to him as Auwm – Ginni's warped pronunciation of his brother's name Om – Ginni lures Jeetu into agreeing to the next phase of transplants. She terminates contact promising that her guards will come for him soon, but Jeetu can hardly contain his impatience to go to her. "She's a goddess and she exists. I would do anything for her – anything!" (241). Such is his fascination that Om is roused into furious jealousy: "But it's mine, what he's seeing – MINE!" he screams (240).

Once Jeetu is taken away for what is later revealed to be a transplant of his entire body, Om follows, determined to put right the mistake that has deprived him of the fate that is rightfully his. The Contact Module thus permits Ginni to weave a seduction fame so enticing that, by the end of it, she has procured herself not one, but two willing donors.

III. A postcolonial novum

It is no coincidence that the Contact Module is the first thing that Virgil commissions Interplanta Services to install in the Donors' household: the entirety of Virgil's plan rests on his ability to purchase this technological gadget and manipulate it for the purposes of procuring agreeable donors rather than begrudging sellers. Yet Padmanabhan's Contact Module is much more than a mere plot device allowing Virgil to get what he wants. It is also the generic contrivance that situates the play within the domain of science-fiction. I propose, therefore, that we dwell on it at length.

In his extensive treatment of the genre, Darko Suvin has argued that science-fiction creates a concrete "point of difference" between the world represented by the science-fiction text and the world that we see and recognise around us. This point of difference, or novum, argues Suvin, is the hallmark of all science-fiction, and is characteristically grounded in a discourse of rational possibility. Thus, the novum is usually a scientific or technological device, creating a realm of *material* rather than merely conceptual or imaginative difference.[10] The novum puts the science-fictional plot into motion, a plot which typically examines the consequences and effects of the novum on the people who inhabit the different world imagined by the science-fiction writer. So far, so clear then. True to the conventions of the genre, *Harvest* contains a novum, the Contact Module, whose purpose is to mediate and enable all interactions between Donors and Receivers so that we, as readers, can meditate upon the effects of such technological "progress" upon first and third-world inhabitants alike. What is significant about Padmanabhan's deployment of her chosen novum, however, is that she tailors it in decidedly postcolonial fashion. And in doing so, she alters several science-fictional conventions.

Take, for instance, Scott McCracken's proposition that "at the root of all science-fiction lies the fantasy of the alien encounter." While I do not doubt that many would choose to take issue with McCracken's generalisation, I propose, for the sake of my own argument, to take McCracken at his word. Regardless of whether or not it encompasses the totality of the genre, McCracken's claim certainly applies to a great majority of science-fictional texts, in which humans embark on lengthy travels to encounter not just alien species from distant galaxies and planets, but also alien

[10] Suvin insists that though the novum need not be a piece of technology, it cannot be anything pertaining to the realm of the magical, or the supernatural. These latter devices are within the purview of fantastic literature.

humans whose alterity resides in their capacity for non-sexual reproduction, or their machine-human hybridity. Just who operates as "the alien" in *Harvest* is not so easy to determine. But this thorny question is better tackled once we hone in on the last word in McCracken's suggestion: "encounter." Ginni, we must remember, communicates with the Donor family only through the Contact Module. In no moment of the play do we witness an actual, physical encounter between Donors and Receivers. Padmanabhan's novum, the Contact Module, thus emerges as an ironic set of signifiers, for its actual purpose is to guarantee that no physical contact whatsoever occurs between first and third world environments. What kind of alien encounter, then, is this?

One, I contend, which responds to the concerns of a *postcolonial* science-fiction. Ginni is adamant that she will not set foot in Indian soil because she dreads contamination from those unhealthy surroundings. The Bombayites of 2010 need no longer fear the journeys of exploration and conquest that gave rise to the alien encounters of the colonial period. In the era of globalisation and biotechnology, the third-world citizen as envisaged in *Harvest* is a menacing, incomprehensible and fascinating alien not because of her colour, her customs and her remoteness, but because of the freakish ability she has to remain healthy in spite of her unhygienic dwellings. It is this constantly-threatened healthiness that Ginni anxiously seeks to acquire before it is too late. For like the Receiver's own body, the Donor's body too is vulnerable to the encroachment of disease and degeneration that must be kept at bay at all costs. Thanks to the Contact Module, Padmanabhan is able to show that while the biotechnologies of global capitalism do indeed fuel fantasies of "a regenerative body, whose every loss can be repaired" (Waldby and Mitchell 30), this fantasy threatens to be destroyed at every turn. As Zygmunt Bauman notes: "the search for the 'truly fit'

body is plagued by anxieties which are unlikely ever to be quelled or dispelled. […] [N]o amount of care or drilling of the body is likely ever to put paid to the gnawing suspicion of malfunctioning" (227).

Yet Ginni never gives up trying. The Contact Module effectively enables her to intervene in the Donor world without having to set foot in the geographical location that they inhabit. She has purchased the rights to Om's organs in order to fend off disease and death and intends to make the most of her investment. Safely ensconced in her sanitised first-world home, Ginni is able to use the Contact Module to police the daily habits of Om's family in order to ensure that the organs that will one day be hers remain healthy too. Thus, realising, after her first "visit", that Om's family shares a toilet with forty other families, Ginni reacts with horror, not because of the precarious economic predicament this state of affairs testifies to, but because it is distinctly unhygienic. "It's wrong", she exclaims. "It's disgusting! And I – well, I'm going to change that. I can't accept that. I mean, it's unsanitary!" (225). Accordingly, Interplanta is commissioned to install a toilet in their home that very same day.

The regular monitoring that the Contact Module permits is rendered even more effective given that only Ginni is able to operate it at will. Om's family never knows when Ginni will "visit" them next. By the opening of Act II of the play, we see how well her strategy is working. Two months have elapsed, and Om is panicking because they are late for lunch. (Lunch, of course, consists of the multi-coloured nutritional pellets provided for them by Interplanta Services.) "You know how [Ginni] hates it when we're late to eat" Om says, worriedly (228). The Contact Module thus allows the receiver to establish a permanent structure of surveillance in Om's home. Fearing Ginni's rebuke, or worse, a revoking of his contract, Om urges his entire family to police their own behaviour. The Contact Module inculcates self-discipline, rendering

the third-world bodies into perfect sites of "docility-utility", optimal sites, in other words, from which to extract the healthiest possible organ (Foucault 135-169).

By keeping Ginni's body remote, the Contact Module signals to the reconfigured circumstances under which third and first world citizens now make contact. Yet the novum also ensures that the Receiver's body is never physically present on stage, for the action of the play transpires entirely in the Donor household. Throughout the play, Ginni is only every visible in two dimensions, on the screen of the Contact Module, a fact that is highly significant given that Padmanabhan's medium – theatre – is explicitly concerned with tangible, embodied and physical presence on stage. The only embodied and easily recognisable actors on this stage, however, are the racially and visually distinct bodies of the third-world Donors. And their juxtaposition with the Receivers serves to turn the reigning paradigm of colonialism's heyday on its head: the former subjects of empire, technologically challenged, racialised and unhygienic though they may be, now become the yardstick for humanity, confronted as they are with first-world Receivers who, though white, are "anatomised as talking heads or offstage voices, digitalised as virtual phantasms of an increasingly sterile world" and thus rendered irremediably and menacingly alien (Gilbert 2006 129).

With no choice but to gaze on a racialised body whose sheer presence on stage challenges the supposed remoteness of the labouring body, the audience now faces the very body that capitalist production in the era of globalisation has displaced into the distant third-world.[11] Whether they like it or not, then, the Contact Module, puts the

---

[11] Many theorists writing about global capitalism today point out that first world economies are increasingly reliant not on production but on consumption (Harvey, Bauman, Hardt and Negri). The workforce of the first-world is ever more disengaged from industrial labour and manufacture either because, in the wake of technological advances, such labour is carried out by non-human means, or alternatively, because human labour is obtained elsewhere. In their drive to multiply profits, first-world economies rely on production sites where "labour is cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, more feminized [and] less protected by states and unions" (Comaroff and Comaroff 295). Typically located in the third-

audience on a par with the Receiver who, like them, gazes at the only physical bodies on stage: the Donors'. The Contact Module thus pushes the play's audience into an uncomfortable identification with the very entity who is responsible for the cannibalisation of third-world bodies that the play so overtly criticises.[12]

I use the word cannibalisation advisedly in order to allude to the postcolonial rewriting of the term that I see Padmanabhan performing. Using, once more, the Contact Module as her tool, Padmanabhan shows how Ginni is able to quarantine Om's family into one room, ascertain that they eat only the processed food-pellets she provides them with and monitor them until she deems that their organs are fit for consumption. Administering the same treatment to the Donors as one would to a pig being fattened for slaughter, the Receiver emerges as a figure with cannibalistic appetites. As Helen Gilbert observes, Padmanabhan thus "neatly refigures the connotative reach of cannibalism so that it points to characteristics of developed rather than 'primitive' societies" (2006 127).

IV. Generating Life

Irrespective of whether they are designed to monitor or pamper, the digital technologies that Ginni has access to effectively reduce Om and his family to little

---

world, such production sites displace human labour to remote geographical locations, making industrial production increasingly less visible in the first-world. The first-world, on the other hand, sees a proliferation of service economies, economies which rely on consumers to purchase increasingly non-material commodities.

[12] Admittedly, this situation would be considerably different if the play were performed in a third-world country. The third-world bodies on stage would be more familiar to the audience, whereas the first-world American character would be visible in the same way as the majority of third-world audiences are already accustomed to from television, cinema and magazines: in two dimensions. However, Padmanabhan has herself admitted that her frustration with the lack of opportunities for English-language playwrights in India led her to enter the Onassis competition and write *Harvest* specifically for production in the first-world (Gilbert 2001 214).

more than sites of *investment* for first-world capital. As Ginni says to the family, warping the pronunciation of Om's name:

> The Most Important Thing is to keep Auwm smiling. Coz if Auwm's smiling, it means his body is smiling and if his body is smiling it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best, smiling organs… (229)

Reading Ginni's actions as an investment signals to the parallels between the human body and land that the play's title, *Harvest*, alludes to. The play, of course, takes its title from the term "organ harvesting", steeped in connotations that need unpacking further than I have done in the preceding chapters. If the term "harvest" refers to the process of gathering crops, then "organ harvesting" effectively assimilates the whole human body, from which a part is extracted, to a crop-producing piece of land, and thus, by extension, to the possibility that land harbours of *generating life*. The extractable human body part is accordingly assimilated to the yield or crop; this is the commodity with genuine use-value, the part that it is profitable to detach from the whole. In order to obtain the best possible harvest, as Ginni is well aware, one must not only select the best possible site in which to invest: one must maintain a continued investment in this site. Quality input will produce quality output: namely, a healthy harvest.

But the analogy between the human body and land is pushed still further in Padmanabhan's play. We recall that *Harvest* concludes with an unexpected plot twist. Interplanta Services has taken away both Jeetu and Om, and Ma, locked away in her Video Couch, is oblivious to the world. Jaya, now alone in the house, watches as the Contact Module springs to life and listens as the real purchaser of Om's body parts, a "red-blooded all-American man" (247) named Virgil, reveals to her that Ginni is literally "a nobody. A computer-generated wet dream" (246). Aware of the illicit

relationship between Jaya and Jeetu, Virgil has appropriated himself of Jeetu's body which he intends to use to impregnate Jaya. His intentions when securing a contract with Om were simple: "We look for young men's bodies to live in and young women's bodies in which to *sow* their children" (246, emphasis added). Padmanabhan's carefully chosen words reveal that the association of the body to the life-generating earth lends itself to a fruitful reading of the maternal body in relation to the dynamics of production. As Helen Gilbert points out, "with this bizarre final twist to the story, Padmanabhan puts organ transplantation and reproductive science [...] on a continuum that suggests ways in which interested capital penetrates the very corpus of its multiple and diverse subjects" (2006 125). We must note, however, that Padmanabhan shows this continuum to be profoundly gendered: thus, "while the men as donors are used as consumable products, the women function more as machines, as productive instruments rather than as products" (Mathur 130). And yet, we might add, equipped as we are with the Arendtian observations to which Mathur unwittingly alludes, Virgil strips down both men and women, reducing them to their functions as mere labourers: thus, women are only required to perform the labour of procreation, while men's bodies are literally consumed, used up, in order to feed the life-process of Virgil and others like him.[13]

In his part of the world, Virgil explains, they have begun to live longer and longer at the cost of no longer being able to reproduce. The solution to this problem lies in a program which allows first-world citizens to purchase third-world bodies, thus profiting from their lack of economic resources: "We support poorer sections of the world, while gaining fresh bodies for ourselves" (246). Padmanabhan thus imagines a

[13] Arendt is also aware of the ties between the labour of (re)production and the labour of procreation: hence her deliberate use of the word *labour*, intended to capture the parallels between the two processes.

dystopian world in which first-world citizens are so alienated from the dynamics of production, and so dependent on the third-world labouring body that they even rely on this body to obtain the products-infants with which to perpetuate the existence of their own people.

Given the nature of Padmanabhan's critique of global capitalism, it is hardly surprising that the ultimate aim of first-world body buyers is to acquire control over the third-world woman. As Gayatri Spivak points out, "the possession of a tangible place of production, the womb, situates women as agents in any theory of production" (57). Virgil, it would seem, acknowledges this. While he treats Om and Jeetu as mere *products* for consumption, Jaya is valuable as a *site* of production. And yet, as he also knows, the female body is not only the site from which *new* labouring, productive and consuming bodies are produced but simultaneously the site responsible for the insertion of the body into materiality and hence the very *mortality* that Virgil is compulsively trying to delay (Braidotti, 65).

Virgil's fear of death, the arrival of which he has invested so much in delaying, colours the strategy he uses to seduce Jaya. Typically, impregnation requires that two bodies, one male, one female, engage in *physical* contact and have *unprotected* sexual intercourse. But Virgil is paranoid about the threat of disease that this act entails; even the environment that Jaya lives in is "too polluted" for him to travel there and physically be with her (247). Once more, he resorts to biotechnology to avoid any exposure to germs, viruses and disease that material bodily practices might entail:

> Virgil: The guards will make the child possible Zhaya. It's just a formality, a device –
> Jaya: Device?
> Virgil: You know, an implant. Something I sent, which they're ready to deliver. And you can take your time. About three days are still within your fertile cycle.

> Jaya: What are you talking about?
> Virgil: Zhaya, I'd love to travel to be with you, but I can't –
> Jaya: Then do it! You who are so powerful – you who can travel from body to body – (247)

Despite all his technological prowess, then, Virgil can do little to change the biological given that the survival of the human species depends upon "a method of reproduction that involves the introduction into the female of genetically alien spermatozoa cells" (Billington, 132). Having undergone all the necessary transplants himself, Virgil must now try to persuade Jaya to undergo a transplant of her own, to become a receiver herself of Virgil's impregnating semen.

Yet Jaya refuses Virgil's proposal outright. She does not want simulated sex or a baby that has been artificially inseminated inside her; she wants "real hands" to touch her, a "real weight" upon her body (247). Rejecting the utilitarian framework that Virgil proposes to her, where the maternal-productive aspect of her body is extrapolated and privileged over her physical desire, Jaya responds to Virgil's advances with an ultimatum: "If you want me, you must risk your skin for me" (248).

Bragging that she cannot win against him, Virgil sends his Interplanta employees to break down Jaya's door. But Jaya has discovered "a new definition for winning. *Winning by losing*" (248, emphasis added). She announces to Virgil that she plans to reclaim the "only thing [she] ha[s] which is still [her] own: [her] death" (248). Thus, Jaya resists Virgil's advances and retains her bodily integrity in one swift stroke: she embraces the very mortality that Virgil and his fellow receivers seek to eradicate from their own bodies. "I'm holding a piece of glass against my throat", she warns an increasingly frustrated Virgil (248). The play concludes on this unresolved note. While Virgil weighs his options, Jaya threatens (promises?) to reclaim her own body through suicide. Padmanabhan thus leaves us to ponder a sobering question: is a

victory that requires the death of the exploited target of global capitalism really worthy of being termed an act of resistance?

Harvest uses science-fiction to pose a potent critique of the invasive and predatory technologies that capitalism uses to exploit and cannibalise third-world bodies. Should third-world individuals resist such commodification? Indeed, can they? A first step towards resisting the rampant technologies that seek to harness third-world bodies, Padmanabhan seems to suggest, is to refuse, like Jaya, to be reduced to a body-part and embrace the material limitations of the corporeality that digital and biomedical technologies seek to override. And yet, under the harsh economic realities of late-capitalism, selling the body's 'spare' parts continues to be the only solution for those who have no other assets to sell. In this context, Padmanabhan's notion of "winning by losing" seems a disturbingly apt way to define the predicament of the third-world individual who has exhausted all other options: lose your own body part to win the cash.

Chapter 3

HOSPITALITY FOR SALE,OR *DIRTY PRETTY THINGS*

I. "Britain is a sovereign nation, not a hotel."

Directed by Stephen Frears and scripted by Stephen Knight, *Dirty Pretty Things* opened in British cinemas in December 2002. The film was received with largely sympathetic reviews which commended Frears for his unflinching look at the underbelly of contemporary London in order to produce a work "in that tradition of gritty urban narrative allied to perceptive social commentary,"[1] a work whose aim is to expose that the city's claim to multiculturalism resides "chiefly in exploiting immigrant labour for the service economy."[2] More importantly, critics applauded Frears for daring to make a film that challenged the terms in which immigrants and asylum seekers were being represented in the British media. "Rather than repeating the image of these figures as parasites upon Britain and its welfare state," writes Sarah Gibson, "Frears instead represents their exploitation by Britain."[3]

I begin by citing some prominent reviews of *Dirty Pretty Things* not only to signal to the predominant mode in which the film has been read – that is, as a welcome critique of the virulent anti-immigrant tirade launched by British tabloids such as the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *The Express* in the 1990s[4] – but also to point to what I see as a mystifying lack of attention, in these reviews, to the major plotline around which the film's narrative revolves. I venture the following plot summary, then, in order to

---

[1] Neil Smith, "The Sum of all Frears."
[2] Peter Bradshaw, "*Dirty Pretty Things*: Review."
[3] Sarah Gibson, "The Hotel Business is About Strangers," 698. The (anonymous) reviewer for *The Telegraph* makes a similar point, claiming that *Dirty Pretty Things* "reverses the perspective that TV news footage gives us on asylum seekers."
[4] For an analysis of the press-campaigns against asylum seekers in the 1990s see Ron Kaye, "Redefining the refugee: the UK media portrayal of asylum seekers" in Khalid Koser and Helma Lutz (eds) *The New Migration in Europe: Social Constructions and Social Realities*. For an analysis of more recent press-campaigns see Arun Kundnani, "In a Foreign Land: the New Popular Racism" in *Race and Class*, 2001 and *Article 19* 'What's the story? Sangatte: a case study of media coverage of asylum and refugee issues," 15 May 2003.

highlight the issue that the film's reviewers gloss over, the very issue that my own reading will bring to the fore.

Set in a contemporary London stripped of all its glamour and tourist attractions, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) depicts a grey, shabby and run-down city. This is the London inhabited by the undocumented immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees whose lives the film portrays. The film's three main characters work in the Baltic Hotel. Senay (Audrey Tatou) is from Turkey. For reasons undisclosed in the film, she has applied for asylum in Britain. She works illegally as a maid, cleaning up after the guests who stay at the Baltic. There, she meets and falls in love with Okwe (Chiwetel Ejiofor), the night-time receptionist at the Baltic. A Nigerian doctor who is fleeing persecution in his own country and has illegally entered Britain, Okwe accidentally discovers that some of the hotel rooms are used as makeshift operation theatres where London's undocumented immigrants have their kidneys extracted in exchange for fake European passports. The procurer of both the willing kidney-sellers and the fake passports is his Spanish boss, Señor Juan (Sergi Lopez). Appropriately nicknamed Sneaky by his employees, Sr. Juan manages the hotel, but this job is a mere cover for his involvement in the international ring of illegal organ trafficking that the film's narrative uses to bring all its main characters together. This happens when, discouraged by the multiple forms of exploitation she undergoes in London, Senay agrees to sell one of her kidneys to Sr. Juan in exchange for a fake Italian passport that will allow her to head for New York. But Okwe, who has begun to reciprocate Senay's feelings towards him, devises a plan that enables them to use the organ trade to their advantage, allowing them to flee London for their respective destinations without giving up their body parts in the process. At the film's conclusion, we see Senay embarking on a flight to New York; Okwe speaks to his daughter on the phone to announce that he is coming home to Nigeria.

Let me not mislead my reader into thinking that the film's reviews entirely ignore the phenomenon of organ trafficking that is so crucial to the film's plot: they do not. Rather, they read the plying of the human body for its organs, figured in *Dirty Pretty Things* as a predicament reserved exclusively for Britain's undocumented immigrants, as a vivid *metaphor* with which to critique Britain's silent exploitation of immigrant labour.[5] Two corrective comments are in order here. Firstly, the studies of medical anthropologists, the writings of biomedical ethicists and the increasing number of media stories about people who have opted to sell their organs out of economic despair show that the international black market in human organs is frighteningly literal. Secondly, even if we do accept that *Dirty Pretty Things* uses the trade in human organs as a metaphor for the exploitation of immigrant labour, we must do so with the reservation that this supposed metaphor elides a crucial theoretical difference between the two forms of exploitation being equated: the immigrant whose organ is extracted is being compensated for her organ, *not for her labour*.

I read the opinions expressed in these reviews symptomatically: the desire to reduce the organ trade represented in *Dirty Pretty Things* to a metaphor for the exploitative relationship between Britain's service economy and the immigrants it employs is a consequence of left-leaning critics' discomfort with New Labour's immigration policies and the continued demonisation of immigrants in the British tabloid press. Frears's film thus becomes a platform through which the socially-

---

[5] Witness Philip French's comment in his review for *The Observer*: "Sneaky, a confident exploiter of anyone's predicament, is involved in the purchase of body parts, kidneys mainly, from the desperately poor to the ailing rich. Is this an urban myth? Who knows? It is certainly a metaphor." Emily S. Davis, writing for *Camera Obscura*, states that *Dirty Pretty Things* is one of several texts which "uses bodily intimacy as a *metaphorical language* through which to represent contestations of national and ideological borders […]" (34, emphasis added). Sarah Gibson's *Third Text* article on *Dirty Pretty Things* is noteworthy in that she *does* manage to read the film without once referring to the organ trade. Instead, she continually insists that the film depicts the illegal underworld of the British service industry, showing that the British economy is dependent upon the grubby work of invisible, undocumented and exploited immigrants.

conscious critic can express her views about "essentially *domestic* political, social and cultural concerns (Foster 688, emphasis added). [6]

Yet there is nothing misplaced in left-wing misgivings about the treatment that the British government and the tabloid press reserve for its immigrants:

> In Britain at the start of the twenty-first century, the government, state, media and public have intertwined in a mutually reinforcing and reassuring process to problematise and often stigmatise asylum-seekers. It is through [*sic*] this combination of anti-asylum sentiment finding legitimacy from the top down, alongside the sustenance provided by the daily press campaign and the encouragement of ordinary people from the bottom up, that enabled a poll carried out in 2003 for *The Times* to suggest that the number of asylum-seekers was 'the most serious problem in Britain at present' (Kushner 261).[7]

Following the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, the government introduced a series of measures to counter the threat of terrorism in Britain. The initiatives, which were designed both to deter the entry of new asylum-seekers and to speed up the deportation of failed asylum-seekers already in the country, effectively served to associate the issue of asylum to that of terrorism (Sales 448). More importantly however, the perceived threat of future terrorist attacks in Britain provided a suitable political climate in which to introduce legislation that merged discourses of homeland security with discourses linking immigration control to welfare control. Thus, amid much speculation and controversy that the British government would tighten home security by introducing national identity cards to thwart the threat of terrorism, the then home secretary David Blunkett announced that while the British government

---

[6] While I cite Kevin Foster in order to make sense of the film's reviews, Foster makes this comment about *Dirty Pretty Things* itself: "The new migrants, like their Commonwealth forebears, are of interest to British filmmakers in so far as they provide a focus for the analysis of essentially domestic political, social and cultural concerns" (688). My own view is that Foster's observation is more productively directed to the reviewers of Frears's film.

[7] Ann Treneman, writing for *The Times* on November 7 2002, offers similar evidence of the British public's misinformation. Treneman cites a MORI poll which reveals that the surveyed "young people" believed that the UK received 31% of the world's refugees, when the real figure is in fact 1.98%. See Anne Treneman, "Promises, promises – why I can't go home", *Times 2*, Nov 7, 2002.

would indeed issue identity cards in order to "help the fight against terrorism," the scheme was mainly intended to tackle "illegal immigration, illegal working and benefit fraud" (*Daily Mail*, Sept 25, 2001). Although widespread public protests have led to the indefinite postponement of the plan to introduce national identity cards, by January 31, 2002, all immigrants planning to claim asylum in Britain were being issued with Applicant Registration Cards which the Home Office described as "the next stage in our battle to cut down on fraud [read: benefit fraud] and illegal working" ("Prejudice feared as asylum-seekers receive ID cards," *The Independent*, Feb 1, 2002). First introduced under a climate of political unease and fear, these government measures tied immigration issues to the problems of an overburdened welfare system, thereby creating what has now become the dominant framework under which immigration and asylum-seeking are discussed in the British public sphere.

"Scrounger, sponger, fraudster, robbing the system, burden/strain on resources, illegal working, cheap labour, cash in hand, black economy…" These are just some of the examples of the venomous language regularly used in the British press to describe immigrants and asylum-seekers, according to a 2004 report of the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (47). New Labour government ministers hardly provide an alternative worth emulating: in November 2002, *The Sunday Times* approvingly cited the home secretary as saying that it was "absolutely crazy that the message has got out that if you get here and claim asylum we will support you" ("Its easy: a few forms, a tired nod and you beat the asylum barrier," *Sunday Times*, Nov 3, 2002). In 2005, the new Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, stated that "the fairness and *hospitality* of the British people ha[d] been tested" by the influx of immigrants and asylum-seekers (cited in Gibson 694, emphasis added).

Hospitality. It is around this enigmatic term that the reception of immigrants into Britain is increasingly discussed by the press and politicians alike. Can Britain

afford to be hospitable to immigrants? Can it afford to provide them with accommodation, clothing and money for food? With welfare benefits such as access to healthcare and education? Do immigrants have the right to claim a hospitable reception in Britain? Does Britain have a duty to hospitably receive immigrants? After all, as Conservative MP Kenneth Baker stated in 1995, preempting his New Labour counterparts by almost a decade, "The first right of any country is [deciding] who should, and should not, have the privilege of living in that country. *Britain is a sovereign nation, not a hotel*" (cited in Gibson 694, emphasis added).

Let us give Mr. Baker's fascinating analogy the attention it deserves. While Mr. Baker specifies that the primary right of a sovereign nation is that of extending hospitality to those whom it deems appropriate, he makes no such stipulation for the rights of the hotel industry. Indeed, he seems to suggest that Britain possesses this right to deny hospitality precisely because it is *not* a hotel. The hotel, unlike a sovereign nation, would thus seem not to possess such a right. Mr. Baker is not wrong: the space of the hotel provides hospitality under the condition and assumption that the guest *pays* for her accommodation. If this condition is met, he seems to imply, the hotel does not have the right to deny the guest its hospitality. The hotel thus differs from the nation because the hospitality that it offers is conditional and commodified.

Mr. Baker's comments effectively serve to open up one of the questions with which this chapter is primarily preoccupied: commodified hospitality. This is one of the rubrics under which I propose that we read *Dirty Pretty Things*. Given its representation of immigrant labour, of sweatshops, of prostitution, and of the extraction of human organs in exchange for some form of payment, *Dirty Pretty Things* is rife with examples of the commodification of the human body for its labour, services and body parts. However, unlike the reviewers who critique British policies on immigration by reading the film's portrayal of the trafficking in human organs as a

metaphorical allusion to the exploitation of immigrant labour, my first claim is that understanding the film's relationship to British debates on asylum and immigration requires that we engage with its organ trafficking plot not as a metaphor, but as a literal transaction that permits the commodification both of human organs and of *hospitality*.

What is so unusual about *Dirty Pretty Things* is that, unlike most accounts that we encounter of the trafficking in human organs, the organ-sellers represented in the film exchange their body parts not for cash, but for forged European passports. The forgeries are on sale: they can be bought in exchange for a kidney. While swapping a kidney for a fake EU passport does not permit the illegal immigrant in Frear's film to become a fully-fledged, legal citizen of the European Union, it does permit the immigrant to live in the EU *as if* she were just such a citizen. What the forged EU passports sell, then, is not citizenship, but that which citizenship entitles one to: the right to hospitality in the EU. The commodification of organs thus mobilises and is in turn mobilised by the commodification of hospitality in, this, its political sense. It is hardly an accident, then, that the film's action transpires primarily in a hotel, that other sphere of legitimate commodified hospitality that Mr. Baker so correctly differentiates from the nation.

Reading the representation of organ trafficking in the film solely as that which allows us to explore the commodification of hospitality, however, risks producing an interpretation of the film that highlights, once again, only those aspects of the film that pertain to "essentially *domestic* political, social and cultural concerns." Concerns, that is, that seek mainly to situate the film within first-world debates about immigration into the first world. Hence my second claim: the focus on the trade in human organs is also what moves *Dirty Pretty Things* to explore capitalism in its current manifestations by interrogating its exploitation of the human body not only for its labour-power but

also for its body parts, that is, for products which that, in a sense, both precede and enable the capacity to labour.

II. "The hotel business is about strangers."

When asked to comment on the elusive title of his film, director Stephen Frears responded that he did not know what it meant (Frears, Director's Commentary). Disappointing as Frears's refusal to be more forthcoming may be, I propose, nevertheless, to begin my reading of *Dirty Pretty Things* by focusing on its intriguing, even oxymoronic, title.

Only at one point in the film are the title's three signifiers deliberately offered up for unpacking. The scene is worth examining in some detail. It involves an interaction between Señor Juan, the manager of London's Baltic Hotel, and his employee Okwe, a man whom we know little about at this point in the film, except that he is from somewhere in Africa, and works two jobs: he drives a mini-cab during the day, and is the night-time receptionist at the Baltic. Okwe has been informed, by Juliette, a prostitute who regularly meets her clients at the Baltic, that there is a plumbing problem in room 510. The improbable object blocking the overflowing toilet in room 510, Okwe discovers, is a "perfectly healthy" human heart.[8] He proceeds to seek out his boss and asks him to call the police. If the sight of Okwe standing before his employer carrying a human heart in a white plastic bag soiled with blood seems fantastic and grotesque, Sr. Juan's cavalier handling of the situation merely heightens our sense of unease: "Police? You think I should call the police?" (*DPT*, Sr Juan).

His tone then changes to a menacing one. "OK. You speak to them. You found it; you do the talking. I'll introduce you." As he dials, he proceeds to question Okwe.

[8] Okwe, *Dirty Pretty Things*. All quotations from *Dirty Pretty Things*, hereafter abbreviated to *DPT*, will be attributed to the corresponding character.

"What is your full name, Okwe? And… you never told me where you are from. Or even why you are here, in this beautiful country" (*DPT*, Sr. Juan). Sensing Okwe's growing discomfort and fear, he hangs up the phone. His smile is triumphant, patronising. Taking the bloodied bag from Okwe and dropping it nonchalantly into the bin, he now proffers some advice: "You will learn Okwe. The hotel business is about strangers. And strangers will always surprise you, you know? They come to hotels at night to do dirty things. And in the morning, it is our job to make things look pretty again" (*DPT*, Sr. Juan).

It is all too tempting to conclude from Sr. Juan's words that the film's title alludes to the shady events and undercover dealings – the dirty things – that occur in the sordid but immaculate Baltic Hotel, things which most of us will never see because those who run the business inevitably make sure that the dirty things are revamped to make them look pretty. I want to argue, instead, that Sr. Juan's words provide a hermeneutical device with which to read the film because they frame the title's three signifiers as a problem of *transformation*. Dirty things, Sr. Juan tells Okwe, must be *changed* to look pretty. This change, moreover, is indispensable: upon it hinges the success of the entire hospitality industry. The film, as we shall see, is rife with examples of the kind of productive transformations that Sr. Juan advocates.

But we are not done with this scene just yet. While it is only Sr. Juan's final words of advice to Okwe that allude directly to the dirty pretty things of the film's title, the covert threats latent in his questions to Okwe contain an implicit reference to other dirty pretty things that we must be attentive to. How come Okwe is in this "*beautiful* country?" Sr. Juan wonders (*DPT*, emphasis added). The semantic parallel between Sr. Juan's chosen word and the second signifier of the title is far from coincidental. Through it re-emerges Mr. Baker's attempt to differentiate between the sovereign nation and the hotel business. Once more, then, we witness an intriguing

link between the hospitality industry – whose task Sr. Juan claims is to make dirty things look pretty again – and the British nation, which, as Sr. Juan's comment would have it, is always and already beautiful, requiring no cleaning up after its guests. Yet Okwe's response of agitated, guilty silence to Sr. Juan's query serves to call his boss's assumption about "this beautiful country" into question. Okwe's unease underscores our sense that, like the guests visiting the Baltic, his reasons for visiting this beautiful country can hardly be 'clean.' Indeed, Sr. Juan implies as much when, at he end of their encounter, he attempts to bribe Okwe "for his troubles" and is met with rebuff. He sneers. "You think if you don't take the money you are innocent?" (*DPT*, Sr. Juan).

Sr. Juan's intimidating questions to Okwe thus serve to place the words of the film's title in a different light. The one time that the words of the film's title occur in the screenplay, they do so only after we realise that if Okwe is now in the "beautiful" U.K., it is only due to shady, suspect methods that can hardly claim a moral superiority over Sr. Juan's tactics in the hotel business. Strongly hinted at here is what we later confirm: Okwe lives in Britain as an undocumented immigrant. And no, he is *not* innocent, even if he refuses Sr. Juan's money. This scene shows us the first of Sr. Juan's attempts to educate Okwe into the way things work in both the hospitality industry and the "beautiful country" they have both chosen to come to. And as we shall see, Okwe learns his lesson well. But let me briefly hold off from a detailed examination of the thorny question of hospitality in order to take a closer look at the equally troubled issue of contemporary capitalism as it is represented in *Dirty Pretty Things*. In order to do this I turn to the film's proud capitalist, the master of profitable makeovers: Sr. Juan.

III. "My whole business is based on happiness."

Sr. Juan belongs to the new class of entrepreneurs made possible by late capitalism. The commodity he proffers to deal in? Happiness. The enterprise? To procure healthy kidneys for the ailing wealthy from those desperate enough to "swap their insides for a passport" (*DPT*, Okwe). Not exactly a pretty business. Yet Sr. Juan insists that his actions are not predatory, but laudable. After all, he argues, he provides happiness: "They sell the kidney for ten grand so I am happy. The person who needs the kidney gets cured, so he is happy. The person who sold his kidney gets to stay in this beautiful country, so he is happy. My whole business is based on happiness" (*DPT*, Sr. Juan). Sr. Juan thus emerges as the god-like figure who can provide hope to those who have lost it, the man you can trust to make the impossible possible, the man who can both prolong your life and provide a passport to happiness. Literally.

Sr. Juan is the ideologue for a new brand of capitalism, a "millennial capitalism" which, as we saw in Chapter 3, "presents itself as a gospel of salvation, [that], if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to *transform* the universe of the marginalised and the disenfranchised" (292, emphasis added). The key to understanding millennial capitalism lies in the particular brand of seduction upon which it operates. According to the Comaroffs this seductiveness is most visibly manifested in the unprecedented, global proliferation of what they term "occult economies" (310). Occult economies, the Comaroffs claim, are characterised by the fact that they all respond to the particular allure of "accruing wealth from nothing" (313).[9] In other words, occult economies are animated by the same tendency that

---

[9] The Comaroffs cite the trade in live human organs as one example of what they mean by occult economies (311). One could well raise the objection that the decision to sell one's organ does not neatly fall under the label of "accruing wealth from nothing." However, as I hope will become clearer below, this description does apply to organ sales insofar as the Comaroffs are discussing wealth accruing actions that do not, strictly speaking, involve the expenditure (or exploitation) of labour-power.

motivates wealth-accruing actions like speculation in stocks and gambling. All these acts seek to harness a force which promises to yield huge profits, yet generates "wealth without production, value without effort" (313-4).

Sr. Juan's lucrative business positions him as the arbiter of one of the many burgeoning occult economies rife in capitalism's millennial moment, an economy whose profits arise from a newly emerged commodity: human organs. To Okwe's moral qualms about his dirty dealings, he retorts with his own version of the salvation gospel. "So I am an evil man, right? But I am only trying to save her life." Sr. Juan's claim refers to his next client, an eight-year old girl whose parents have brought her from Saudi Arabia to London "hoping for a miracle" (*DPT*, Sr. Juan). A miracle Sr. Juan is more than willing to perform… for a profit.

When recast in the light of his cleansing rhetoric, Sr. Juan's dirty, illicit dealings in the trade of organs for fake EU passports emerge as a polished, pretty combination of profitable altruism and a miraculous remedy for illness and illicitness alike. But to stop at this neat equation would be to ignore that Sr. Juan's dirty trade, is precisely that, a *trade*. And like any tradesman, he deals in those "very strange *things*" also known as commodities (Marx 163, emphasis added). Which brings us to the signifier in the film's title that I have hitherto paid little attention to, the one, I contend, that allows us to read the commodification of human bodies permitted by late capitalism together with the commodification of hospitality that the Baltic Hotel repeatedly points us to. First, however, let us try to trace a relationship between the dirty pretty *things* in the film's title and the "things" that Sr. Juan trades in.

IV. "Because you are poor you will be gutted like an animal."

The commodity, Marx has taught us, insists upon some form of objectification. In the commodity, people and their labour are transformed into "an object of economic

desire," (Sharp 293). An object of desire, because, if exchanged, the commodity will satisfy a particular human need. An object of *economic* desire, because the need can only be met through an exchange of money, the universal equivalent with which all commodities can be acquired. So, what exactly is it about the kidney that makes it a viable candidate for commodity status, a coveted object of economic desire? As the work of anthropologists Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Lawrence Cohen has shown, the transaction in human organs transforms the kidney into a life-saving commodity. For both the buyer and the seller, the kidney-as-commodity harbours the possibility of satisfying what Nancy Scheper-Hughes terms "the most basic of human desires: the desire for life" (Scheper-Hughes 51).[10]

It is precisely the fulfilment of this "desire for life," claims Sr. Juan, that his business is designed to enable. Yet the self-aggrandising portrayal he offers of his dealings simultaneously recognises that the "life" he metes out to his kidney-*buying*-clients is by no means equivalent to the "life" he offers to his kidney-*selling*-clients. The former, he says, "get cured" (*DPT,* Sr. Juan). They live; they are saved from death. The latter, on the other hand, "get to stay in this beautiful country," [ibid]. They gain a passport which confers *the right to live*…in the EU.

The distinction made by Sr. Juan corresponds to Giorgio Agamben's distinction in his work *Homo Sacer*, between *zoē*, the simple fact of living common to all living beings, and *bios*, a form of living proper to an individual who legitimately

[10] I have opted, for the purposes of my argument, not to quote Scheper-Hughes in full here. The full quote, which reads, "the desire for life, vitality and élan," refers principally to the desires of the ailing kidney-buyer rather than to the principally economic concerns of the kidney-seller. As such, it unsettles the idea, fallacious though it may indeed be, that I wish to present above: namely, that the transaction serves equally to satisfy the needs of both kidney-buyer *and* kidney-seller. I pursue this point at length below.

inhabits a given sphere of political governance or *polis*. *Zoē* thus refers to the sheer *fact* of being alive; *bios* to the *right* of living within a given political order.[11]

The secret to the kidney's commodity status resides in both the co-existence of *zoē* and *bios* and the disjunction between them. The same applies to Sr. Juan business. Indeed, we can locate its rentability in the fact that Sr. Juan appears to have discovered that he can make a hefty profit while catering to the needs of two very different groups of people, people whose economic circumstances may vary, yet who are nevertheless united in the fact that they are "bioavailable."

Bioavailablity, Lawrence Cohen has argued in the context of his work on kidney transplants, is an ontological condition made possible both by technical progress in the medical field, and the advent of late capitalism. Cohen develops his notion of bioavailability with reference primarily to the kidney-*seller*, who "is hailed through nephrectomy – the extraction of a kidney – as a bioavailable source of newly scarce tissue for the often financially better-off but dying" (Cohen, "Operability" 171). While acknowledging my debt to this concept, I contend that when considering the commodity status of the kidney, as I am attempting to do here, the concept of bioavailability must be extended to include the kidney-*buyer*, precisely because she is financially better off but *dying*. [12] Once exchanged, then, the kidney extends the *zoē* of its bioavailable-because-ailing buyer, and ascribes *bios* to its bioavailable-because-disenfranchised seller.

---

[11] Agamben himself ascribes these terms to *zoē* and *bios* respectively. Witness his claim that in modern politics, read, politics after the Holocaust, "*bios* and *zoē*, *right and fact*, enter into a zone of irreducible distinction" (8, emphasis added).

[12] The same can be said of Agamben's point on the signifier 'people.' "What we call 'people,'" he says, "[is] in reality not a unitary subject, but a dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles: on the one hand, the set of People as a whole political body, and on the other, the subset of the people as a fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies" (177). My point, again, is that when considering the kidney-as-commodity, the second group of people (small p) that Agamben alludes to, the people comprised by a group of "needy and excluded bodies," comes to include both the wealthy *and* the poor, thus creating what Agamben himself has termed, "a zone of irreducible indistinction" (9).

Paradoxically, the mobilisation of "life" in these two senses that the exchange of the kidney permits is precisely what calls the "thing" status of the kidney into question. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes has suggested, there is something profoundly problematic about reducing "a living and strangely animate kidney" to a mere object (52). Marx's discourse on the nature of commodities allows us to establish that the kidney *is* a commodity: like other commodities, its exchange serves to satisfy certain needs. However, in this age of millennial capitalism where "there is no limit to the commodity candidacy of things" (Appadurai 2) his discourse sheds little light on the peculiar *transformations* that the exchange of this particular commodity enables. Transformations, these, that occur precisely because the kidney-as-commodity is no ordinary, lifeless object.

Sr. Juan's enterprise shows that the kidney's indistinctive status as not-quite-a-thing is what lends it its literally *life-transforming* quality. Within the plot of the film, I want to argue, the secret to the kidney's commodity status resides in its ability to mobilise both *zoē* and *bios*. Thanks to the organ transaction, the undocumented immigrant acquires the possibility of transcending that condition because she obtains a literal passport into the sphere of *bios*. And she acquires that possibility because the new owner of her extracted kidney is able to extend her own *zoē* and transcend her infirm condition.

V. "He is English now."

When Okwe asks the wife of a Somali kidney-seller what he obtained in return for his organ, she replies simply, "He is English *now*" (*DPT*, emphasis added). The third world individual who resorts to selling her organ is represented in *Dirty Pretty Things* as a person who is lured not by millennial capitalism's promise of sudden wealth, but by the millennial promise of undergoing an overnight transformation that will change

her from an undesirable, undocumented immigrant in an otherwise "beautiful country" into a person welcomed into the first-world thanks to her rights-conferring passport.[13]

The film thus confronts us with a chilling solution to the calamity of being deprived of the rights of citizenship that Hannah Arendt discusses in her essay "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man." "The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such," Arendt states, "broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human" (Arendt, 179). Arendt argues that in a world comprised of sovereign nation-states, the so-called inalienable rights of man reveal themselves to lack any reality if they do not take the form of rights belonging to the citizen of a state. The people who have lost their place within a given political community are left with nothing except "the abstract nakedness of being human" (*ibid*). "[Their] general human condition […] [is that] they have lost all those parts of the world and all those aspects of human existence which are the result of our common labour, the outcome of the human artifice" (180).[14] "[T]hese rightless people," Arendt concludes, "are indeed thrown back into a peculiar state of nature."

If *Dirty Pretty Things* offers a different perspective on the organ trade from the one that we are accustomed to, it is because it confronts us with the possibility that even the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human, the condition that Arendt

[13] Within the logic of the film, the EU passport, by providing the illegal immigrant with the rights to reside in Europe, seems to contribute to the discourse of transformation and beautification that underpins Sr. Juan's advice to Okwe early in the film. Like the labour of those who clean up after the guests in the Baltic, the forged passport cleans Britain of its illegal immigrants, rendering the nation into a beautiful space that welcomes and trumpets its multiculturalism. The fact that the passports are acquired in exchange for a kidney makes for an interesting parallel with the role of the kidney in the human body: the kidney filters waste (read: undesirable elements?) from the blood (read: nation?) in order to excrete (read: deport?) them from the body.

[14] Arendt's terminology here shows that she had yet to develop her distinction between labour and work. "The Decline of the Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man" was written in 1951, seven years prior to the publication of *The Human Condition*.

defines as “mere existence,” can now become an exchangeable commodity. *Dirty Pretty Things* invites us to examine a disturbing paradox: namely, that the rightless people thrown back into a peculiar state of nature, use this very state of nature as the ultimate collateral with which to regain their rights. Reduced to mere existence, the rightless part with an object that is not the outcome of the human capacity to create artificial objects but rather with the object that is required to mobilise this capacity, an object they have learnt to see as a naturally occurring ‘surplus’: the spare organ that will endow them with all the rights pertaining to European Union citizenship.

But *Dirty Pretty Things* raises equally, if not more troubling questions about the commodity that illegal immigrants receive for their organ: a forged EU passport. It is the question that I have hitherto being postponing: what kind of rights have the rightless exchanged their organs for when the passports they receive are not only forgeries but those “very queer *things*”, *commodities*, acquirable in exchange for a kidney? I contend that we can only begin to answer this question by focusing on the discourse of rights that both Agamben and Arendt introduce in their respective arguments. The language of human rights brings us directly back to questions of hospitality, a hospitality understood, that is, as the rules of conduct governing the arrival of a guest or stranger into one’s home. In a lecture delivered in Istanbul in 1997, Jacques Derrida rereads Kant’s oft-quoted essay “Perpetual Peace” in order to glean what insights this text might have to offer for debates on hospitality. In this lecture, Derrida describes hospitality as a *human right* (Derrida 1997a 4). In the context of human rights, Derrida continues, “hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory.”

The gesture of linking hospitality to the concept of human rights, serves to link Derrida’s understanding of hospitality to Hannah Arendt’s. While Agamben speaks of the sphere of rights only to remind us that we all live as citizens of a given political

community, Arendt and Derrida pick up where Agamben leaves off in order to explore what happens to a person's human rights once they become *strangers*, that is, once they are displaced from their countries of origin and arrive in another.

Once this happens, says Derrida, the ethical imperative, "the *law* of hospitality" requires that we offer the new arrival "an unconditional welcome" by:

> say[ing] yes *to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female (2000 77).

I read Arendt as appealing to this same unconditional hospitality in her analysis of how the peoples displaced by World War I were received by other nation-states. However, as she and Derrida are well aware, this human right to be unconditionally welcomed, a right emerging from the ethical imperative that is unconditional hospitality, can hardly be put into practice in a world that is governed by sovereign nation-states. For this human right clashes – let us not forget Mr. Kenneth Baker here – with the primary right of the sovereign nation to decide upon whom it admits within its confines. Thus, says Derrida:

> A cultural or linguistic community, a family, a nation, cannot not suspend, at the least, even betray this principle of absolute hospitality: to protect a 'home', without doubt, by guaranteeing property and what is 'proper' to itself against the unlimited arrival of the other; but also to render the welcome effective, determined, concrete, to put it into practice. Whence the 'conditions' which transform the gift into a contract, the opening into a policed pact; whence the rights and the duties, the borders, passports and doors, whence the immigration laws, since immigration must, it is said, be 'controlled'(1997b 6).[15]

[15] In his Istambul lecture, Derrida explains the difference between unconditional (or absolute) hospitality and conditional hospitality using slightly different terms. The difference between the two, he says, "is the difference, the gap, between the hospitality of invitation and the hospitality of visitation. In visitation there is no door. Anyone can come at any time and can come in without needing a key for the

Sr. Juan's role in *Dirty Pretty Things* is thus to provide illegal immigrants with the thing, the document, that will permit them to reside in the EU *as if* they had been the recipients of EU hospitality. To the perturbing possibility that one can regain one's rights by commoditizing the only thing that one is left with, one's body part, *Dirty Pretty Things* presents us with the horrifying vision of a world in which there is no such thing as the ethical imperative of unconditional hospitality. In *Dirty Pretty Things*, Mr. Baker's distinction between hotels and sovereign nation-states collapses. Here, all hospitality is made conditional, not through the right of the nation-state to deny hospitality, but through commodification: the right to hospitality conferred by the passport, like the right to hospitality conferred by the hotel room, is for sale.[16]

VI. "If you were just some African, the deal would be simple."

In *Dirty Pretty Things*, the kidney-as-commodity seems to be that which lends truth to Agamben's sweeping if sobering claim that "today's democratico-capitalist project […] transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare-life" (180). If we recall that by bare life Agamben means "that zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture" (109), then the film is indeed littered with illegal Third World immigrants who might justify an allegorical reading that substantiates Agamben's claim. But this neat interpretation is upset by the film's determined attempt to ensure that its two main immigrant characters, Senay and

---

door. There are no custom checks with a visitation. But there are customs and police checks with an invitation" (1997a 14).

[16] As Derrida points out, the realm of unconditional hospitality is the realm of the gift. Where the conditional hospitality of nation-states transforms the gift of hospitality into a contract, hospitality as it is figured in *Dirty Pretty Things* belongs in the realm of the commodity. The dichotomy between hospitality-as-gift and hospitality-as-commodity aptly mirrors contemporary debates on the ethics of organ transplanting: should organ donation remain within the altruistic domain of the gift, or should we legalise a market in human organs and thereby commodify them?

Okwe, transcend the predicament envisaged by Agamben's apocalyptic claim. What solution, then, does *Dirty Pretty Things* propose for our two immigrant characters?

Let us first turn to the film's protagonist, Okwe. Upon making inquiries of his colleagues in the organ trafficking ring, Sr. Juan discovers that Okwe is a trained doctor from Nigeria. He then seeks out Okwe putting a proposal before him."If you were just some African," he says, "the deal would be simple." Sr. Juan's wily observation thus recognises what Agamben's ominous assertion about the third world ignores: class. Though forced by his illegal status to work as a night-time receptionist and a cab-driver, Okwe is in fact a doctor. Okwe's professional training does not exempt him from the contempt that Sr. Juan reserves for all the undocumented immigrants who rely on him to "swap their insides for a passport." But it does place him in a privileged position: he has more to offer than his bare-life. For Okwe is *not* just some African. For these, the deal is simple: "You give me your kidney, and I give you a new identity" (*DPT*, Sr. Juan). For Dr. Okwe, however, Sr. Juan has a better idea. He proposes that they become business partners, Okwe handling the surgical extraction of the kidney, and Sr. Juan its safe delivery and the procurement of passports. If Okwe agrees to this deal, he will get much more out of it than "some African." Sr. Juan promises him not just a passport for himself, but one for Senay, the woman he loves. In addition, given that unlike his fellow undocumented immigrants, Okwe *will* be expending his labour-power, Sr. Juan offers him £3000 for every operation he performs.

But Okwe insists that he does not want to get involved. Throughout the film, he remains an exceptional figure in the ruthless London that he inhabits, exceptional because he insists upon upholding his moral principles.[17] Where Sr. Juan sees the

[17] Okwe is also exceptional in that he is the only character who is given a history. We know his story, his reasons for leaving Nigeria. Perhaps this history is what allows his character to overcome the somewhat clichéd representation that the film reserves for all its other immigrant characters. Okwe's

promise of happiness, Okwe sees "the age of *un*happiness, an age of nervous exhaustion, greediness and desire, in which no one is proof against foolishness; [an age in which] farce cohabits with buffoonery, caprice with brutality, […] [where] death itself is repulsive" (Mbembe 238, emphasis added). And in this age of unhappiness, Okwe is the doctor-cum-working-class-hero, whose self-appointed role becomes, as he himself announces to us in the film's opening scene, to "rescue those who have been let down by the system."

And rescue them he does. We first meet Okwe loitering in one of London's airports. Two recently arrived men look around, bemused, searching out the person who was meant to pick them up. The person has failed to show up, but Okwe, in his cab-driver's guise, takes them to their destination. Okwe the night-time receptionist at the Baltic, rescues Juliette, the prostitute who frequently meets her clients at the hotel, from being physically attacked by an aggressive customer. Knowing that Senay will get into trouble if the immigration authorities find out she is working illegally, he stops her from clocking in along with the other maids at the Baltic as the two law-enforcement agents scrutinise the faces of every other maid, eager to find Senay among them. And, of course, there are the rescue-missions of Okwe the doctor, who helps his fellow cab-drivers by illegally procuring antibiotics for their gonorrhoea, and saves a Somali man from the potentially lethal operation wound caused by the extraction of his kidney under Sr. Juan's supervision. And true to the gallant nature of any hero worthy of the epithet, Okwe refuses to charge for his many services.

---

friend, the Chinese refugee Guo-Yi, for example, is represented as being a cynical Buddhist and a keen chess player. One scene of the film shows us a distressed Senay who plays loud Middle Eastern music as she whirls around her apartment like a dervish. Perhaps the most clichéd portrayal of all, however, is that of Sr. Juan, the evil Spaniard. In "Why Spaniards Make Good Bad Guys: Sergi Lopez and the Persistence of the Black Legend in Contemporary European Cinema", Samuel Amago asks the very pertinent question: why does *Dirty Pretty Things* continually point to the bad guy's Spanishness? I take up Amago's question, and the interesting response he offers, below.

Okwe's exceptionality is signalled to not only because of the stark contrast he poses to Sr. Juan, but because he emerges as the only figure who vehemently refuses to be seduced by the brand of happiness that Sr. Juan proffers to his clients. Thus, Okwe's close friend Guo Yi, who works in a mortuary, attempts to talk him out of his moral illusions. When a kidney is worth ₤10,000, he argues, it is understandable that people should want to sell their kidneys. "For ten grand people take risks. If I had the courage, I'd sell my kidney, just so I could get out of here" (*DPT*, Guo Yi). Ultimately, and despite Okwe's disapproval, even Senay turns to Sr. Juan to sell her kidney. But it is not only Okwe's unflinching refusal to participate in Sr. Juan's occult economy that sets him apart. Okwe is also one of the few men in the film whose relationship to women is not predicated upon some form of sexual exchange.

VII. "I can't believe Okwe didn't fuck you!"

A disappointed British viewer of the film might well agree with Sr. Juan's remark to Senay upon finding out that she was a virgin before he raped her. The UK edition of the film's release on DVD shows a close-up photograph of the black man and the white woman who play the film's main characters, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Audrey Tatou. On the left, Ejiofor stares defiantly into the camera, his arm wrapped protectively, possessively, around Tatou's neck. Tatou looks up into the distance, her hand resting on his arm. Above them, we read the words of the film's title in clean, white font: Dirty Pretty Things. The image occurs nowhere in the film, and is probably a promotional photograph taken to cash in on the rather problematic sexual innuendoes that the title lends itself to.

But any possible expectations about dirty pretty sex between the black man and the white woman that the consumer might expect from this photograph will be met with disappointment. Okwe and Senay's relationship remains strictly platonic.

They share an apartment, but Okwe sleeps on the couch even when Senay is away and her bed empty. Courteous and caring, Okwe cooks for her, protects her, even enlists the help of Juliette, the damsel-whore whom he once rescued from an aggressive client, to supply Senay with a morning-after pill when he finds out that Sr. Juan has raped her. Yet rape, as we shall see, becomes a problematic term to use in the web of interpersonal relationships between men and women that the film depicts.

With the exception of Okwe and Guo Yi, all men's encounters with women are shown to be not only sexual but *contractual* in nature. Okwe's male co-workers all visit prostitutes. It is from one such "popular lady" (*DPT*, Okwe) that Okwe's fellow cabbies contract gonorrhoea. Ivan, the Russian doorman at the Baltic, reserves a slot in the busy schedule of prostitute Juliette on every payday. And when not directly related to prostitution, the film presents sex as a service performed not for money but for some alternative form of compensation. This is the case of Senay, whose informal contract with her Asian boss entails that she not only labour in his sweatshop, but regularly "suck" him so that he does not inform the immigration authorities that she is working there illegally, (*DPT*, Senay).

By portraying sex in such a light *Dirty Pretty Things* juxtaposes what is known as "the oldest profession" with a decidedly new economy: the trade in human organs. Nowhere is this more clearly evidenced that in the scene where Senay loses her virginity to Sr. Juan. Room 510. Senay gets ready for the kidney-extraction operation. She is freshly bathed and enveloped in an appropriately white, virginal bathrobe when Sr. Juan comes in with the paperwork for her soon-to-be-issued fake Italian passport. Having established what her new Italian name will be, Sr. Juan moves closer to Senay and attempts to undo her robe. When Senay refuses to submit to his sexual advances Sr. Juan laughs at what he sees as their unwitting parody of horny husband and disinterested wife arguing over their fraught sexual rights under a marriage contract.

"Listen to me," he says. "I am arguing with you like you are my fucking wife!" (*DPT*, Sr. Juan). His point, of course, is that theirs is a different kind of contract, subject to different rules. Under *this* contract, Senay's robe becomes "what the Americans call a 'deal-breaker'" (ibid). The deal Sr. Juan proposes to her consists of not one, but two causally linked deals. In order to be coded as a seller of her commodity-kidney, Senay must in fact agree to the prior sale/surrender of a second commodity she intrinsically yet accidentally possesses: the possibility her body holds of satisfying Sr. Juan's sexual desire.[18] Those are the terms, says Sr. Juan. "Take it or leave it" (ibid). Senay chooses: she takes it. If rape is defined as sexual intercourse into which one is forced against one's will, what name do we give to what Sr. Juan does to Senay? The unlikely pairing of Senay the (no-longer) virgin and Juliette the whore, who later bond in the bathroom over a morning-after pill and a joint, thus serves to underscore this very question. Are this virgin's actions any different from the whore's?

Senay's personal tragedy, in fact, resembles the clichéd and unfortunate irony of the prostitute's lot in love: the man she is in love with is the one man she does not sleep with. If we fast forward to the film's conclusion, which takes us back to the airport in which it began, we see the only romantic moment that Senay and Okwe share. Senay is about to go through customs. Before leaving Okwe's sight, possibly never to see him again, she mouths, "I love you" (*DPT*, Senay). Okwe responds by mouthing "I love you" back. But is there any room for love in this world of rampant commodification that *Dirty Pretty Things* lays before us, where the promise of sexual gratification is a commodity like any other, where sex is a "dirty thing" that occurs in sweatshops, hotel rooms and basements, infecting men and women with STDs? How

[18] I deliberately use the somewhat contradictory formulation "sale/surrender" here because the terms of Sr. Juan's deal validate the usage of both terms. Senay surrenders her body to Sr. Juan because in one sense she gets no extra form of compensation for it, economic or otherwise. Yet in another sense, she in fact sells it, for she thereby ensures the completion of the second transaction, that of her kidney, for which she *will* be compensated.

to factor love into a film that portrays the age of millennial capitalism, where sexuality harbours the spectre of AIDS and stands, "metonymically, for the inchoate forces that threaten the world" (Comaroff and Comaroff 305), where sexual intercourse is figured as a transaction in which affect is reduced to a singular, ironic signifier – a prostitute named Juliette?

The film's solution, I contend, is to *transform* love. Love here is pretty and pristine insofar as it is an emotion that transcends an economy of transactions; in this world rife with dirty pretty things, love can be pretty only when it leads to no physical consummation, hence no gratification. To be defined as such, it seems, love must exceed the circuit of transactions to which all else is subjected. And to do so, it must remain platonic. "I can't believe Okwe didn't fuck you," we might say along with Sr. Juan and our hypothetical dissatisfied consumer, albeit for substantially different reasons. Yet, as we shall see, the film counters this potential disappointment with another, more satisfying plot twist.

VIII. "So…You are human, Okwe?"

Rewind back to room 510. Now that she has fulfilled all the terms of her contract with Sr Juan, Senay's operation awaits. And it is an operation to be performed by none other than the man who loves her, the man who will not allow Sr. Juan to "butcher her": Okwe. Sr. Juan's gleeful reaction upon hearing the news is to proclaim that Okwe is human, after all. His love for Senay reveals a weakness, a *human* weakness, for which he is willing put his moral scruples on hold. An act of love his decision may indeed be. But, if he is going to get involved in Sr. Juan's business, albeit to protect Senay, why let his rescue mission go unrewarded? Operating on Senay requires his skills as a doctor. And so, Okwe demands compensation for his labour. In return for his services, Okwe too wants a passport, "a new identity" (*DPT*, Okwe). Yes, the

hitherto morally upright hero is human after all. As human as Sr. Juan, as human as Sr. Juan's clients, buyers and sellers both. Human because he, too, feels the sense of despair "that comes from being left out of the promise of prosperity, from having to look in on the global economy of desire from its immiserated exteriors" (Comaroff and Comaroff 315). Human, in short, because he can no longer afford to play the hero.

Or can he? We soon realise that it is not Senay's kidney, but Sr. Juan's that Okwe plans to extract. Once again, Okwe emerges as a heroic figure who, though not able to save his distressed damsel from sexual exploitation, can at least save her from nephrectomy. And he can afford to do this precisely because of his social class. He can afford, in other words, to love Senay.[19] Being a doctor endows him with the power to bargain with his skilled labour rather than his bare-life; it allows him to negotiate himself into a position from which he can set up a 'kidney-swap.' And, most importantly, it allows him to save Senay.

A hero, yes. But now a more human one, whose deeds require of him that he play the villain's game. A compromised hero who stands to gain from his acts of heroism. A hero who saves his beloved by engaging in the very act that he has hitherto looked down upon as immoral. It is to the acts of just such a hero that we must turn to in order to expose the film's most seductive and satisfying proposition, the one which promises us that Senay and Okwe have successfully avoided being reduced to a bank of spare body-parts.

[19] In his article "The Other Kidney," Lawrence Cohen argues that thanks to immunosuppression drugs such as cyclosporine, the kidney-purchaser is able to frame his decision to buy a kidney in terms of love for her family, from whom she need no longer ask for a kidney donation. Thanks to cyclosporine, "love, if one can afford it, means never having to ask for or to sacrifice family flesh" (Cohen 19). I contend that in *Dirty Pretty Things* love also emerges as an emotion which one can afford, if not in strictly economic terms, then, as Okwe's case shows, in terms of one's social status and upward mobility.

IX. "We are the people you do not see."

After Okwe has extracted Sr. Juan's kidney, he heads down to the hotel's parking lot. In his hands, a styrofoam box containing the organ. On either side of him, the virgin and the whore. A well-dressed, white Englishman emerges from a black car to greet them. He takes the box, and gives them a suitcase containing, we presume, a substantial amount of cash. But he is curious. Who are these people? How come he has never seen then before? It is Okwe's cue. "Because we are the people you do not see," he retorts. "We are the ones who drive your cabs. We clean your rooms. And suck your cocks" (*DPT*, Okwe).

It is a seemingly beautiful moment, the culmination of the thriller-fable that is *Dirty Pretty Things*. It is the instant in which the revenge of the invisible people is crystallized, the instant in which an insalubrious trinity comprised of recently-virgin-maids, doctor-cabbies and cock-sucking-whores delivers justice upon the people whom they serve, the people who never see them. It is an instant rendered all the more beautiful because this justice, delivered in the form of Sr. Juan's kidney, is itself, like its deliverers, invisible. For unlike us, the audience, our bemused Englishman is not privy to the full meaning behind Okwe's words.

Spoken in the name of all the invisible people, Okwe's words proclaim justice, the ultimate triumph of the downtrodden people who have successfully directed their "communal action […] against those who ply the immoral economy" (Comaroff and Comaroff 326). But this is no ordinary proclamation of justice, no legally declared punishment on Sr. Juan's vile actions. This is the triumph of "informal justice," where state institutions are completely by-passed; it is a justice meted out by the compromised hero who takes justice into his own hands "in the millennial hope of restoring coherence and control in a world run amok" (Comaroff and Comaroff 326). Justice, because this community plies the immoral economy for ultimately *moral* ends.

And by so doing it succeeds in using the dirty means of the exploiter for infinitely prettier things than economic profit. Prettier things, more human(e) things: a passport with which to travel to New York and pursue the American dream, a much needed new identity with which to go back to one's motherless daughter, and, of course, the sweet taste of revenge that comes from knowing that one has given the villain a taste of his own medicine.

But who is this villain? A closer look at him, I want to suggest, reveals that it is not only Okwe's actions that are morally compromised, but the film's narrative too. Frears's film squarely blames the "historically cruel, licentious, rapacious Spaniard", himself an immigrant, for the exploitation of the film's non-Western immigrants (Amago, 58). The film takes explicit care to point out that the primary exploiter of undocumented immigrants is *not English*. Thus, as Amago points out, the supposed solidarity of the "invisible people" that this scene portrays is undercut by the "symbolic equation" latent in the fact that the organ that Okwe, Senay and Juliette sell belongs not only to the film's villain but to someone who is himself an immigrant (Amago 59). In a narrative where there are no English exploiters to blame, British reviewers' attempts to read the film as a critique of the *British* exploitation of illegal immigrants emerge at best as ironic, and at worst, as profoundly narcissistic.

<u>*X. Who wants to be a millionaire?*</u>

Capitalism in its millennial manifestations finds a succinct representation in *Dirty Pretty Things*. It is, as we have seen, a horrific capitalism, in which bare life itself is susceptible to consumption and hence commodification. Yet it is simultaneously a seductive capitalism, a capitalism whose immoral and dirty means of generating wealth can, if rightly harnessed, transform the bleak universe of the disenfranchised into a place that is infinitely prettier: a place where one can aspire to happiness, a

happiness definable, of course, both according to Sr. Juan's dubious parameters, and to the more poignant concerns of Okwe and Senay. Indeed, one can read *Dirty Pretty Things* as a narrative which shows that the promise of millennial capitalism lies precisely in the possibility of transforming our definition of happiness from that of Sr. Juan to that of his once-victims. And herein, precisely, lies the key to the narrative pleasure that the film is able to provide. For it is by depicting this transformative process, wherein happiness derives its meaning not from plying the immoral economy, but from that most fundamental of hopes, the aspiration to "a meaningful social existence," that the film is able to make its own brand of seductive, and perhaps horrific, promises.

I want to suggest that in the space of its 97 minute running time, the film unravels a narrative in which the fantasy of those of us on the political left is realized. This narrative weaves a world in which there are no human-rights lawyers, no committed sympathizers to the cause of the disenfranchised, no believers, in other words, in the ethical imperative of unconditional hospitality. But we do not need them. For in this world, the invisible people take it upon themselves to act; they form an ephemeral, briefly visible political alliance in which differences of gender, nationality and class are forgotten in the interests of a common goal. Senay, Juliette, Guo Yi and Okwe form a tiny multitude-in-singularity, a parallel non-civil society which succeeds in revealing the failings of global capitalism. It does so, however, by plying the seductive facet of capitalism, its promise that a wily wielding of its mechanisms can lead to overnight transformation. And it is precisely this seductive facet of capitalism that the film itself harnesses in order to provide a short-cut to our fantasies of an end to exploitation. A scathing critique of millennial capitalism *Dirty Pretty Things* may indeed be, yet in affording us the enchanting, seductive and fantastic pleasure of witnessing the fulfillment of our own aspirations to see a 'revolution' of the kind that

will put an end to the grotesque injustices of global capitalism, the film is a cultural product of this very millennial capitalism. And we, the audience who derive pleasure from the fantasy, complicit victims of that same seductive capitalism that we seek to critique.

A final word on the making of *Dirty Pretty Things* is perhaps in order here. Stephen Knight, the screenplay writer of the film, is known, among other things, for having scripted a game-show into whose name are condensed all the seductive promises that millennial capitalism makes to those of us who live under its reign: *Who wants to be a millionaire?* After watching *Dirty Pretty Things*, a more fitting question to ask, it seems, is: who doesn't?

Chapter 4

UNDEFERRABLE DONATIONS: KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *NEVER LET ME GO*

I. Departures and Exceptions

Volo ut sis (I want you to be).

Saint Augustine, cited in Hannah Arendt's "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man."

Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go* is a departure. A departure, firstly, from Ishiguro's own thematic concerns. For *Never Let Me Go* invites, not unproblematically, as we shall shortly see, the label of science fiction, which sits somewhat jarringly with Ishiguro's reputation as a master depicter of human psychology. Narrated in the first person by thirty-one year old Kathy H, the novel consists of Kathy's reminiscences about her youth and the love triangle that develops between her two closest friends, Ruth and Tommy, and herself. It is a story shaped by the training process they all undergo as young students, and Kathy fastidiously recalls their teachers, or "guardians," as she refers to them, who provided an education consisting primarily of classes that urged them to create works of art, poetry and literary critical essays. She explains how, with Ruth and Tommy's help, she unravelled the mystery behind this puzzling emphasis on creativity, and wonders just when she and her fellow students first became aware of "how [they] were brought into the world and why" (36). When was it, she muses, that she and her fellow students first realised that they were clones? When did they finally come to accept that their sole reason for existing was to supply organs for the rest of society, until, their bodies being exhausted of useful parts, they were left to "complete"?

But the novel is also a departure, secondly, from the texts I have discussed in both my previous chapters, not only because this text – a novel – lacks a visual dimension to it, but because, equally importantly, we are dealing here with a world in which the *choice* to part with one's organs, much as this concept is problematised in *Harvest* and *Dirty Pretty Things*, is, in this novel, not an issue. This is deliberately so, for *Never Let Me Go* asks us to think through a different set of questions. These questions come from a text that uses the conventions of science-fiction only to warp them, creating an idiosyncratic genre not absolutely without relation to the rules of science-fiction. To the extent, however, that science-fiction, as Hannah Arendt has noted, articulates and interrogates the "the mass sentiments and mass desires" to which scientific achievements give rise, we can tentatively place *Never Let Me Go* within this category (2). We can assert also that the organ providers in the novel are best described with this non-committal term: "providers." Unlike the two other texts I consider in previous chapters, the organ here is not a commodity to be exchanged. Neither is it a gifted object of altruistic donation. Special citizens whose role in society is to provide vital organs for the ill and dying, the protagonists of this novel exist, quite simply and horrifically, only for this purpose.

This chapter seeks to make sense of this double departure by exploring three salient markers of exceptionality that occur in *Never Let Me Go*. Admittedly, I use the term 'exceptionality' somewhat flexibly. While I hope my usage of the term will become clearer shortly, if pressed for a definition, I would describe it as an unsettling quality that repeatedly interrupts and complicates a given object's relationship to an otherwise fixed and identity-conferring category. I contend there are three such figures of exceptionality at work in this novel: its genre, its primary setting and its protagonists.

Upon opening the novel, and prior to any narration, we are greeted with a page that is blank save for three words that provide the spatio-temporal coordinates for the narrative we are about to encounter: "England, late 1990s." Yet, as we quickly realise in the very first paragraph of Kathy's tale, this is an alternate, unfamiliar universe, one comprised of "carers" and "donors."[1] Lest we should be tempted to equate these donors to those we might think we are familiar with from news reports of successful transplants or heroic organ donations, the novel's donors are immediately singled out as being different, for we are told that hardly any of Kathy's donors have been "classified as 'agitated,' even before *fourth donation*" (3, emphasis added). An alternative England thus emerges, involving the defamiliarised use of familiar terms and medical feats we know to be impossible. On cue, we call forth the label "science-fiction." The problem, however, as the reader will go on to learn, is that there is no mention of medical procedures in the novel, no allusion to specific organs, no explanation of how donors who are not yet ready for "completion" are kept alive after their first organs have been extracted. Or, to put it another way: no *science*.

Together with making sense of the novel's exceptional genre, there is the problem of classifying the exceptional place that is Hailsham. Only the first of the novel's three parts transpires in there, and yet Hailsham remains a reference point for Kathy throughout her narrative. Kathy first mentions Hailsham in the novel's second paragraph, but the word occurs together with a qualifying remark that immediately signals to its exceptional status: "I'm a Hailsham student – which is enough by itself

---

[1] Before becoming donors, Kathy and her fellow clones spend a period of time acting as "carers", or nurses, for other donors. Kathy's first words reveal that she is even more exceptional than her peers, having been a carer for eleven years, when the average length of time spent as a carer is two or three years (3).

sometimes to get people's backs up" (4). If it is a place with "students," we might initially think, Hailsham is probably a school or college. We later learn that Hailsham is located in an unnamed region of rural England, and is really a cultivation centre, a sinister institution designed to rear future donors. And yet most of Kathy's memories of Hailsham are far from morbid. Indeed they often verge on the trivial, focussing on the petty teenage dramas and predictable anxieties that we might expect from any young adult. Yet this banality is often interrupted by inconsistencies that sit uncomfortably with a typical boarding school narrative, not least because Hailsham is all but an average boarding school. Furthermore, its status as clone-rearing-institution notwithstanding, part of what makes Hailsham "so *special*" is that most of the time it resembles an arts and crafts school, and its students seem perpetually to sit in classes on poetry, art and art appreciation (17). What, then, are we to make of the bizarre status of Hailsham, a place that unsettles those who do not belong to it, and which sounds like such an improbable place in which to find a clone?[2]

As for Hailsham's pupils, they can only be as special as the institution. Hailsham students are constantly referred to as being somehow exceptional. The students' guardians voice this sentiment in largely cautionary terms designed to police the students' health habits, but are always careful to insert a positive, flattering tone into their language. Thus, Hailsham's headmistress, Miss Emily, treats the students to weekly lectures in which she reminds them that "[they] [are] all very *special*, being Hailsham students, and so it [is] all the more disappointing when [they] behave badly" (43, emphasis added). Miss Lucy, one of their guardians, gives them a lesson on the

---

[2] Hailsham operates in a linguistically unconventional way too. Mostly used as a proper noun, Kathy sometimes uses it as an adjective, as when she refers, for instance, to the possibility of having intimate relationships with people who "weren't Hailsham" (189).

perils of smoking: "You're students. You're...*special*. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that's much more important for each of you than it is for me" (68).[3] Yet these comments by the guardians are interrupted with darker thoughts from Kathy, who realises, in retrospect, that throughout her young age there were moments when she fearfully anticipated a confrontation with her exceptionality that would not be quite as heartening as her guardians would have her believe:

> Because it doesn't really matter how well your guardians try to prepare you: all the talks, videos, discussions, warnings, none of that can really bring it home. [...] All the same, some of it must go in somewhere. It must go in, because by the time a moment like that comes along, there's a part of you that's been waiting. Maybe from as early as when you are five or six, there's been a whisper going at the back of your head, saying: 'One day, maybe not so long from now, you'll get to know how it feels.' So you're waiting, even if you don't quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realise that *you really are different to them*; that there are people out there [...] who don't hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you [...] and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs (36, emphasis added).

I have chosen to begin my discussion of *Never Let Me Go* signalling to its various modes of departure because exceptionality and category-defying figures and institutions, permeate the novel's plot, its genre and, not least, my own reading of the novel. The remainder of this chapter will explore at length what I have suggested are three of the primary figures of exceptionality at work in the novel, thus revealing why I propose to read the novel as I do: that is, as a meditation on the relationship between

---

[3] Despite obvious parallels here to the kind of supervision that Ginny submits Om and his family to in *Harvest*, I want to resist equating the donors of *Never Let Me Go* to those of *Harvest*. In the play, concern with health is represented as a corollary of Ginny's predatory goals and manifested through the surveillance device that is the Contact Module; *Never Let Me Go* not only articulates this concern in the pedagogical discourse of *education* but does so to repeatedly underscore the students' difference from non-donors. I explore this point at length below.

the human and the artifices it creates. Thus, the novel's very protagonists are artifices, man-made clones, products of biotechnological advances who add yet more artifices to the world through their constant production of works of art. And yet their artificially engineered lives, as we shall see, are characterised by repeated and always unsuccessful attempts to seek out their commonality with humans. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that the novel's plot is structured around these failed attempts. It is through them that the novel's questions to the reader emerge, questions all, I contend, that stem from the epigraph with which I open this introduction: "I want you to be." This assertion, an ethical imperative of sorts, is one we should be able to make of our fellow beings, says Hannah Arendt, "*without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation*" (181, emphasis added). Which brings us to the artificially created protagonists of *Never Let Me Go*. For how can we say this of Hailsham's clones, created only to enable the use that will be made of them?

II. Students and clones

[The]future man, whom scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebelliousness against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has produced himself.

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

The rebellious man of the future, according to Hannah Arendt, is the man that science aspires one day to produce, the man whose life span will easily exceed the hundred-

year limit.[4] That we have not yet reached this stage fifty years after Arendt's observation, and the question of whether or not we ever will, matters little here. Of crucial importance, rather, is what Arendt characterises as "rebelliousness": that is, the desire to counter the "free gift from nowhere" that is human existence with something that man has himself produced.[5] This, I contend, is precisely the parallel universe that *Never Let Me Go* transports us to. We are in an alternate 1990s England, where medical science has progressed to the point of "cur[ing] so many previously incurable conditions [that] [t]his is what the world notice[s] the most, want[s] the most" (262). It is a world in which humans depend on the likes of artificial humans such as Kathy and her fellow students for prolonging their existence. And they have the right to do so, it seems, because Hailsham students have been produced by human ingenuity, created, unlike the rest of us, to fulfil a very definite purpose. Radically outside the realm of the given, outside of that which Arendt has elsewhere described as the sphere of "everything that we have not produced, [of] everything that is merely and mysteriously given to us" (181), Hailsham students belong, unlike the rest of us, to the realm of the "human artifice," the place where inexplicable mysteries cease, and are replaced with functionality, utility, instrumentality.[6]

---

[4] This, too, is a goal achieved only when we begin to "act into nature." See Chapter 2 for a discussion of what Arendt means by this.

[5] To the question of whence this rebellious desire to act into nature arises, Arendt replies that it is part of a wish, fed by scientific achievements, to escape our human condition as earth-bound creatures tied to certain natural laws. Her prime example is the Sputnik, launched in 1957, one year prior to the publication of *The Human Condition*. Arendt observes that the satellite sparked not so much pride and awe at the achievements of man's scientific knowledge, but rather *relief* at the fact that the Sputnik represented "the first step towards man's escape from imprisonment to the earth" (1, emphasis added). Significantly enough, given the concerns of *Never Let Me Go*, Arendt aligns "the attempt to create life in the test tube" to this same desire to escape imprisonment to the confines of the earth (2).

[6] See Hannah Arendt's "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man": "The more highly developed a civilisation, the more accomplished the world it has produced, the more at home men feel within the human artifice – the more they will resent everything they have not produced, everything that is merely and mysteriously given to them (181).

Miss Lucy attempts to bring home just this point to her students when she overhears two of them imagining what kind of life they would lead if they became actors when they grew up:

> *The problem, as I see it, is that you've been told and not told*. [...] If you're going to have decent lives, then you've got to know and know properly. None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. So you're not to talk that way any more (81, emphasis added).

Not only have Hailsham students been brought into the world as man-made, fabricated creatures; they are further distinguished from their creators in that, unlike them, they need not be philosophically burdened with questions as to their origins and destinies. *They* were brought into the world for a purpose; *they* need not search for an answer as to what their existence means, need not trouble themselves even with speculations as to how they will make a living. *They* exist, in other words, as exceptions to the Kantian formulation that exhorts us to see man as an end in himself, as a being, that is, who is exempt from becoming a link in the chain of ends and means. If they are to lead "decent lives" the students must remember what distinguishes them from all non-donors: as donors, they exist only as a means to fulfil the ends of their users-creators.

Or so it would seem. Yet contrary to what we might expect upon reading Miss Lucy's words out of context, as they occur here, Hailsham students are more often

encouraged to *forget* that they exist as a means to postpone the death of "normal people" (139). Miss Lucy's frustration, we must note, lies in the fact that the students have been "told and not told" about who or what they are (81). It is a wily observation on Miss Lucy's part, one I propose that we read in the light of Giorgio Agamben's salutary observation that exclusion does not entirely serve its intended purpose of severing all ties to the norm: "the exception is a kind of inclusion. What is excluded from the general rule is an individual case. But the most proper characteristic of the exception is that what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule" (17). Agamben's reminder, I contend, is one that Hailsham educators do not need: their entire pedagogical system is based upon it.

As we eventually realise through Kathy's recollections, the training that students receive at Hailsham is as artfully designed as they are. Told repeatedly that they are special, exceptional, and unlike all non-donors, they are also *not told* these very same things. And it is by virtue of being told and not told, I contend, that the knowledge of the donations that await them does not incite the students to lose their will to live, or even to rebel against their predetermined fates. What they are told and not told invites them, rather, to delight in life, to whole-heartedly embrace what they *share* with the non-donors they are otherwise, as exceptions, set apart from. At Hailsham, the guardians make sure that the students *are* told that what they share with non-donors, besides, of course, their compatible vital organs, is an appreciation for the carnal and aesthetic pleasures of life. For, throughout their time in Hailsham, in fact, the students enthusiastically engage in creative projects that are so important to all of them that they think of little else, aware that "how you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at creating" (16). Later, in their post-puberty years, this interest in creativity is somewhat

thwarted by their curiosity about sex, which becomes what "'being creative' had been a few years earlier" (98).

Large portions of the novel explicitly discourage us from the temptation, given the instrumental world we are dealing with, to read Hailsham's emphasis on creativity and openness about sex as a convenient way to both contain and sublimate the students' potential rebellious desires to revolt against their makers. Until the novel's climax, we are instead urged to view creativity and sex as the very things which make it so difficult to categorically differentiate the donors from the normal people who dwell outside the confines of Hailsham. Until the confrontation that occurs in the novel's final moments, creativity and sex signal to a liminal zone through which the students try to establish their commonality with non-donors. I dedicate the entirety of my next section to the question of creativity. For now, I shall discuss the students' relationship to sex and its corollary: procreation.

The topic of sex is first broached in an anatomy lesson conducted by Miss Emily, the headmistress. Unsurprisingly, she takes care to remind them that they have to be careful whom they have sex with, because of the sexually transmitted diseases they can contract through intercourse. But she also warns them that they are different from other people "out there," to whom sex "meant all sorts of things" because unlike students, people out there "could have babies from sex" (84). Hailsham students, however, cannot reproduce.

The students' inability to procreate evidences the extent to which their lives have been carefully engineered to ensure that their (re)production lies solely within the control of their creators. The cloners of *Never Let Me Go*, it would seem, have learnt their lesson from their fictional predecessor, Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein, we

recall, incurs the wrath of the creature he has manufactured by refusing to provide him with the female companion the creature requests, precisely because of his fear that:

> Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, *yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth* who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror (165, emphasis added).[7]

Although they are never specifically mentioned, the engineers responsible for designing the donors have put right the glitch that Frankenstein overlooked. There is no fear, now, almost two hundred years after Frankenstein's cautionary tale, that more undesirable students will be brought, unbidden, into the world.

While they are explicitly told that their sterility is what sets them apart, the students are never told about the implications of this. Will they, as Victor Frankenstein so readily assumes of his own creation, "thirst" for children? On the one hand, Kathy states that none of them are "particularly bothered" about their sterility, "being pleased," rather, that they "could have sex without worrying about all of that" (73). On the other hand, there is the incident that serves to give the novel its title, and strongly suggests otherwise. The episode sees Kathy listening to a song she is particularly fascinated by. Sung by one Judy Bridgewater, the song is titled "Never Let Me Go." As Kathy listens to the chorus she imagines that the song is about a woman who had been told that she could never have babies. "Then there's a sort of *miracle* and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: 'Baby,

---

[7] It is worth noting that towards the end of *Never Let Me Go*, the students are referred to by one character as "poor *creatures*" (254, emphasis added) thereby eliciting a further comparison with Mary Shelley's novel, in which Victor Frankenstein produces a nameless being referred to alternately as "creature," "monster" and "daemon." Indeed, Keith McDonald, in his article on Ishiguro's novel, argues that *Never Let Me Go* "recurrently finds parallels" with *Frankenstein* (75).

never let me go...' partly because she's so happy but also because she is afraid something will happen" (70, emphasis added). One particular time, Kathy is privately listening to the song, acting out her fantasy by clutching a pillow-cum-baby to her breast, when she is observed by an outside visitor, a non-donor, and Kathy is mortified, not least because she notices that the eavesdropper is crying.

Kathy's fantasy, much like her observer's reaction, hardly needs decoding. I mention it because it serves to highlight that by virtue of being " told and not told," Hailsham students readily accept and welcome their difference – in this case, their ability to have sex without ever worrying about pregnancy – and yet continue to aspire to "miracles" through which they will somehow transcend this same exceptionality. It is, to be sure, a peculiar state to live in. Yet examples of it abound in the novel, even after the Kathy and her friends cease to be students, and leave Hailsham to live in The Cottages, waiting to be called upon to become carers, and, eventually, donors.

It is while they are living in The Cottages, in fact, that Ruth, Kathy and Tommy embark on a search for Ruth's "possible." Possibles, as Kathy explains, are based on the simple idea that since each donor is at some point copied from "a normal person," then a donor might be able to find the person that she is modelled from (139). Ruth and Kathy claim to be pragmatic and sensible about the theory of possibles: "Our models were an irrelevance, a technical necessity for bringing us into the world, nothing more than that" (140). And yet, says Kathy, "we all of us, to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you'd get *some* insight into who you were deep down" (*ibid*). We see here, again, that the donors, fully cognisant of what they have been told, accept their bizarre origins only to voice almost in the same breath and in a manner somehow reminiscent of adoptive children in search of their biological parents, their belief that tracking down one's model can lead

to a form of revelation about who they really are.[8] It is, perhaps, a way of imagining who they might have been should things have been different, should they have been biologically engendered rather than technologically engineered.

This time, however, as befits their fast-approaching initiation into the brutal realities of caring and donating, their fantasies are short-lived. It is Ruth who shatters all their illusions when the search for her possible ends badly. The woman they have come to check on, tipped off by fellow-students, is a middle-class office worker who turns out neither to resemble Ruth or have her mannerisms. Pretending not to be surprised or disappointed, Ruth articulates what they have all long suspected, but never been told:

> But look, it was never on. They don't ever, *ever*, use people like that woman. Think about it. Why would she want to? We all know it, so why don't we face it? We're not modelled from that sort... [...] We're modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. We all know it, so why don't we say it? A woman like that? Come on. (166)

Though no explicit mention of either economic compensation or scientific procedures occurs here, carefully implied in Ruth's outburst is the extent to which technological prowess pervades the economic structures of the fictional world that we are dealing with here. A middle-class office-worker would never need to sell her genetic material to clone engineers in the way that the outcastes of society would. In this society where the human artifice reigns, a productive use has finally been found for the unproductive

---

[8] I realise, of course, that the claim I endorse here, together with the students – namely that one's biological parents might well reveal something about oneself – is not unproblematic, having doubtless been complicated by biologists and psychologists alike. Nonetheless, I believe that my larger point regarding the donors' complex relationship to their own exceptionality still stands: the cloned donors look for something that will tie them to the affective, non-technologically-permeated aspects of the non-donors' world despite knowing that their models are not parents but technical necessities for bringing them into the world.

“indefinite, disintegrated mass” of vagabonds, discharged jailbirds, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers and other undesirables that make up the *lumpenproletariat* as Karl Marx defined it in his *Eighteenth Brumaire* (section V).

I close this section with a third and final example of the students’ poignant attempts to continually seek a miraculous occurrence that will provide them with a link to the world of non-donors. If the desire for a child and for an encounter with a potential parent figure characterises these searches in Hailsham and in The Cottages, respectively, then what the students seek in the third and final section of the novel, when they have all embarked on their “careers” as donors and carers, is “a deferral.” Bluntly speaking, a deferral is a way for Kathy and Tommy to “buy time.” Interesting as this reversal is, given that Kathy and Tommy exist in order to allow non-donors to buy time in the form of death-postponing vital organs, what is relevant for our purposes is that Tommy and Kathy seek to buy time using the human emotion of *love* as a currency. They have heard, intermittently throughout their lives, the rumour that as students of Hailsham they can claim special treatment. “If you were a boy and a girl, and you were in love with each other, really, properly in love, and if you could show it, then the people who run Hailsham, they sorted it out for you. They sorted it out so you could have a few years together before you began your donations” (153).

We cannot talk about deferrals, however, without dwelling at length on the issue of creativity. It is to the proliferation of poetry, sketches, sculptures and crafts that the students endlessly create while at Hailsham that I will now turn.

III. Works of art and souls

[T]he proper intercourse with a work of art is certainly not ‘using’ it; on the contrary, it must be removed carefully from the whole context of ordinary used objects to attain

its proper place in the world. By the same token, it must be removed from the exigencies and wants of daily life, with which it has less contact than any other thing.

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

I will discuss *Never Let Me Go*'s deferrals after a brief deferral of my own. This is more than a neat contrivance on my part; I wish to reflect at length on one aspect of Hannah Arendt's observations in *The Human Condition* that I withheld from discussing in my introduction: the value of the work of art. Arendt's comments on the work of art seem, somewhat deceptively, to occur almost in passing, but I bring them to the foreground here in order to read creativity as it operates in the novel. Two things are worth restating here. Firstly, its pedagogical emphasis on creativity is just what makes Hailsham such a special institution. Secondly, if the students are constantly encouraged to be creative, this is because creativity plays a crucial role in forging a complex tie of commonality between the exceptional students and their normal counterparts.

Before mentioning the work of art, Hannah Arendt embarks on a discussion of work that will already be familiar to my readers from Chapter 2. To briefly recap: work produces the human artifice, objects that are durable and stable; it is for this reason that work can create a world that can "be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man" (136). The work of art, as the term itself implies, not only pertains to the realm of work. For Arendt, the work of art is the culmination of work as an activity.

Her chapter on work, however, is also where Arendt embarks upon a discussion of value. This is the fitting place in which to do so because, says Arendt, *homo faber* exists primarily in the public realm that is the exchange market. The

animal laborans can neither build nor inhabit this public, worldly realm because his "social life is worldless and herdlike," engaged as he is in privately meeting the biological necessities his life-process requires.[9] The *homo faber*, by contrast, needs a public space where he can "show the products of his hand and receive the esteem which is due to him. [...] The point is that *homo faber*, the builder of the world and producer of things, can find his proper relationship to other people only by exchanging his product with theirs" (160). And it is the exchange market that best allows him to do this (ibid).

Arendt's discussion of value is suggestive because of what it allows us to glean about the role of the work of art in *Never Let Me Go*. Arendt begins by reminding us that value is always, first and foremost, "value in exchange" (163). Thus, "value is the quality a thing can never possess in privacy but acquires automatically the moment it appears in public" (164). Her next move, however, takes us into thornier territory, for she proceeds to distinguish between "intrinsic worth" and "marketable value." Intrinsic worth, Arendt says, citing Locke, "is an objective quality of the thing itself; [...] something attached to the thing itself" which exists "outside the will of the individual purchaser or seller" (*ibid*). Marketable value, on the other hand, has nothing to do with intrinsic worth, for the marketable value of something is altered only through "the alteration of some proportion which that commodity bears to something else" (*ibid*).

Initially, the categories of intrinsic worth and marketable value seem to map quite neatly onto Marx's distinction between use-value and exchange-value

---

[9] We recall, however, that Arendt argues that all work has now been subsumed to the labouring process. This is shown, she claims, in the fact that the objects produced by work are increasingly perceived as products for consumption rather than for use.

respectively, especially when, to illustrate her definition of intrinsic worth, Arendt states that the intrinsic worth of, say, a table can only be ruined if we deprive it of one of its legs.[10] So why confuse us with this Lockean terminology? Because, Arendt holds, while Marx correctly saw in the prioritisation of exchange-value over use-value the root cause of capitalist exploitation, he understood use-value not as referring to the intrinsic worth of something, but as alluding only to its *functionality*. Here, then, is another critique that Arendt reserves for Marx's analysis of political economy.

Substituting the instrumentality-infused term "use-value" for that of "intrinsic worth" leaves us, however, with a series of difficult questions. What is intrinsic worth? How might we measure it? Precisely, replies Arendt. We cannot. For it no longer exists:

> [T]he loss of [the] intrinsic worth [of all things] begins with their transformation into values or commodities, for from this moment on they exist only in relation to some other thing which can be acquired in its stead. *Universal relativity, that a thing exists only in relation to other things, and loss of intrinsic worth, that nothing any longer possesses an 'objective' value independent of the ever-changing estimations of supply and demand, are inherent in the very concept of value itself* (166, emphasis added).

Difficult as it may be to accept, Arendt argues, the advent of the exchange market means that there is no longer such a thing as "absolute value" (165). Or is there? And here we must embark on a symptomatic reading of the *form* of Arendt's argument. For having categorically established, in the remark I cite above, that the universal relativity brought on by the exchange market annihilates all possibility of thinking

---

[10] To compare with Marx: "*The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value*. But this usefulness does not dangle in mid-air. *It is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity*, and has no existence apart from the latter. […] (*Capital I*, 126, emphasis added). As opposed to the qualitative aspect of a commodity that use-value describes, exchange-value refers to the quantitative dimension of the commodity. Exchange-value, then, is "the *proportion* in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind" (*ibid*, emphasis added).

about intrinsic worth, she inserts a footnote in which she poses the question anew, thus inviting us to interrogate the validity of her initial argument:

> In the absence of an exchange market, it was inconceivable that the value of one thing should consist solely in its relationship or proportion to another thing. *The question, therefore, is not so much whether value is objective or subjective, but whether it can be absolute or indicates only the relationship between things* (166, fn 38, emphasis added).

Why reformulate the question, displacing it to the margins of her argument, when she has seemingly already dispensed with it? The answer, I contend, lies in the subsequent section of this chapter of *The Human Condition*. Separated from this footnote by a mere paragraph, this section deals, significantly, with the case of the value of the work of art.

"The immediate source of the art work," Arendt tells us in this next section, "is the human capacity for thought" (168). Thought is distinguished by the fact that it "has neither an end nor an aim outside itself" and, consequently, "men of action and the lovers of results in the sciences have never tired of pointing out how entirely 'useless' thought is – as useless indeed as the works of art it inspires" (170).[11] The work of art belongs to that special series of objects, which exist within the realm of the human artifice, and yet "are strictly without any utility whatsoever and which, moreover, because they are unique, *are not exchangeable and therefore defy equalisation through a common denominator such as money*" (167, emphasis added).

---

[11] To the possible objection that a work of art is an end product, the object resulting from thought, Arendt responds, "And not even to these useless products can thought lay claim, for they as well as the great philosophical systems can hardly be called the results of pure thinking, strictly speaking, since it is precisely the thought process which the artist or writing philosopher must interrupt and transform for the materialising reification of his work" (170). A further response can also be gleaned from the epigraph that opens this section of my chapter, in which Arendt makes clear that the work of art is in a sense useless, precisely because it is removed from the sphere of all other use-objects.

We can diagnose Arendt's resistance to the foreclosure of the possibility that absolute value may yet exist, then, as a desire to make sense of the exception that is the art work, for its uniqueness defies the logic of the exchange market and all attempts to measure its value in proportion to another thing.[12] Arendt is hardly alone in musing over the relationship between the work of art and other objects that men produce. In 1955, only three years prior to the publication of *The Human Condition*, Maurice Blanchot observed that "art has as its goal something real: an object. But a beautiful object. Which is to say, an object of contemplation, *not of use*, which moreover, will be sufficient to itself, will rest in itself, refer to nothing else, and be its own end (in the two senses of the term)" (212, emphasis added).[13] "Within the overall human undertaking," he adds, "where the tasks conforming to the universal will for production and emancipation are necessarily the most immediately important, art can only follow" (212-3).

To reiterate: "[T]he work – the work of art, the literary work – is neither finished nor unfinished: *it is*. What it says is exclusively this: that it is – and nothing more. Beyond that it is nothing. *Whoever wants to make it express more finds nothing, finds that it expresses nothing*" (Blanchot, 22, emphasis added). I belabour the point, perhaps. But I do so only to underscore the paradox that seems to structure the lives of Hailsham students: namely, that although they themselves exist solely as useful products of the human artifice, as means to a specific end, they are perpetually engaged in the creation of works of art which, unlike the students who produce them,

---

[12] Marx himself was aware of this. Witness his observation in *Capital III*, which I cite in chapter 2: "[T]he prices of things that have no value in and of themselves – either not being products of labour, like land, or which cannot be reproduced by labour, such as antiques, works of art by certain masters, etc. – may be determined by quite fortuitous combinations of circumstances" (772).

[13] I cite only half of Blanchot's remarks here in order to preserve the flow of my own argument. Suffice it to say here that Blanchot adds an important caveat to this observation, to which I return below.

exist only as objects of contemplation. These works of art, moreover, will survive the "completion" of the artists who produced them, will continue in the world despite having no functional utility whatsoever.[14]

It is hardly surprising, then, that the students, aware as they are of their own useful purposes, cannot help but wonder what happens to the objects that they create in Hailsham's classrooms. They speculate with the few facts they have: every so often, about three or four times per year, a mysterious woman known to all as Madame visits Hailsham. She operates as the chief evaluator of the students' art work, and "the lead-up to her arrival," Kathy informs us, "began weeks before, with the guardians sifting through all our work – our paintings, sketches, pottery, all our essays and poems" (33). Once the art work is on display, Madame tours the exhibition and promptly leaves with a selection of the students' finest creations. If the students believe that Madame consistently picks their best work, this is because the guardians have impressed upon them that "it was a great honour to have something taken by Madame" (39).

Mystified as to what she could possibly do with their creations, the students imagine that Madame has a Gallery, a private collection of Hailsham students' artworks. Not that this explains much. "[W]hat *is* her Gallery?" Kathy asks of Tommy at one point. "She keeps coming here and taking away our best work. She must have stacks of it by now. [...] Why should she have a gallery of things done by us?" (30). Neither Kathy nor Tommy appear satisfied with the explanation that Madame is a collector of sorts, albeit a rather morbid one, given the fate that awaits the artists in

---

[14] It is true that the students trade their own works of art during events known at Hailsham as Exchanges. But these Exchanges do not confer any utility to the students' creations. As Kathy explains, Exchanges are the only way students can acquire a "collection" of aesthetically pleasing objects in order to "decorate the walls around [their] bed" or "place on [their] desk from room to room" (16). Within Hailsham, then, the work of art remains strictly an object of contemplation.

question. In fact, even as the youngsters they are when this conversation takes place, they seem to intuit that, as far as the outside world is concerned, everything that relates to them is somehow circumscribed within the field of utility. Thus, Kathy voices her conviction that Madame's Gallery is related to their own future donations: "I don't know why, but I've had this feeling for some time now, that it's all linked in, though I can't figure out how" (31).

Years later, Tommy and Kathy return to this question. Things are different now. They have left Hailsham; they live in The Cottages; Tommy and Ruth are in a relationship, although the intimate conversations between Kathy and Tommy, and the mutual emotional support that they provide for each other constantly alert the reader to a love triangle in which not Kathy but Ruth is the true intruder. In this particular conversation, Tommy and Kathy discuss the rumour of deferrals that they have heard from other, non-Hailsham donors who are envious of this exception, granted only to Hailsham students. Obtaining a deferral, we recall, will postpone donations in order to grant two Hailsham students some extra years to spend together. As long as they are truly in love. But: *how do you prove to someone that you are truly and properly in love?* A timeless, even hackneyed question, to be sure, but one that is removed here from the dilemmas and passions aroused by requited and unrequited love familiar to us from high and popular culture alike. The question as it is formulated by Tommy and Kathy demands to be read as *they* read it: that is, with straight-faced and naive literality. How do you *prove* to someone that you are truly and properly in love? How do you prove *to someone* – someone else, someone outside the love relationship – that you are truly and properly in love? Read thus, the question demands a response that resembles more a mathematical proof than it does a discursive treatise. And it is just such a response that our two characters arrive at.

Convinced that he has finally arrived at a solution as to how Madame's Gallery may be related to their future donations, Tommy lays out his theory for Kathy. He reminds her of an incident at Hailsham, when a fellow student had asked their headmistress, Miss Emily, why Madame took their art away. Miss Emily, Tommy recalls, had first avoided the question by emphasising what a privilege this was for any student. Then, whether intentionally or not, Miss Emily had added "that things like pictures, poetry, all that kind of stuff, [...] *revealed what you were like inside*. […] [*T*]*hey revealed your soul*" (175).[15] From this, Tommy concludes that Madame's Gallery is not a collection of artwork, but a collection of *evidence*:

> Suppose two people say they're truly in love, and they want extra time to be together. Then, you see, Kath, there has to be a way to judge if they're really telling the truth. That they aren't just saying they're in love, just to defer their donations. You see how difficult it would be to decide? [...] But the point is, whoever decides, Madame or whoever it is, *they need something to go on*. [...] Suppose two people come up and say they're in love. She can find the art they've done over years and years. She can see if they go. If they match. Don't forget, Kath, what she's got reveals our souls (175-6).

Ironically, this novel about organ donors would transport us, through Tommy's theory, into a world where "matching" refers not to tissue-typing and other immunological procedures designed to *match* a transplant patient to a compatible organ donor, but to an art depot harbouring evidence of heterosexual compatibility. If such a match-sanctioning place does exist, muse Kathy and Tommy, then it would also explain Hailsham's special status, its resemblance to an arts and crafts school, the importance that all the guardians attached to the students' creativity, the reason for the

---

[15] Upon hearing this remark from Tommy, Kathy's first reaction is to suppress laughter as she remembers a drawing one of her Hailsham friends had done of her own intestines. Again, the narrative encourages us to see – and this time to laugh, along with Kathy, the narrator – at how literally the students interpret certain statements.

envy they have always sensed in non-Hailsham students: "The thing about being from Hailsham was that you had this special chance. And if you didn't get stuff into Madame's gallery then you were as good as throwing that chance away" (176).

In this final "miracle" that the students aspire to, we see, once again, how the students reconcile the facts about which they have "been told and not told" in order to weave together a narrative in which they both accept their impending completion, and yet seek to defer death through a time-gaining gesture that assimilates them to their human counterparts. Created by non-donors in order to keep death at bay, these donors now hope to turn to their creators to ask for reciprocal treatment, if only for a few precious years. But the hope for a deferral, much like the hope for an illuminating encounter with a "possible" or the secret desire for a child alluded to in the earlier sections of the novel, is never fulfilled. And how could it be otherwise? *Never Let Me Go* is not driven by the motif that so often recurs in science-fiction: that of the unpredictable glitches and surprises that the carefully designed objects of human ingenuity and artifice spring upon its over-confident creators.[16] In this text, the clones do not rebel; in this text, I contend, every hope nourished by the donors is included not to raise the possibility of its fulfilment, but only to allow us to better picture the alternative universe that the novel imagines for us. And what the idea of *deferrals* allows us to understand is the role of the work of art in this artifice-permeated universe.

---

[16] I have in mind such canonical science-fiction narratives as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where the spaceship computer, Hal, turns evil, and rebels against the astronauts on board, or Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*, in which the female protagonist falls in love, despite all her initial qualms, with a robot. In *The Island*, a film which also deals with clones designed for organ harvesting, the clones discover the fate that awaits them and rebel against the human world.

Only at the climax of the novel is the issue of deferrals unravelled. By this time, Ruth has completed, but not before apologising to Kathy and Tommy for having kept them apart for all these years. Her final reconciliatory gesture is to extract a promise from them that they will visit Madame, whose address she has tracked down, in order to seek a deferral. When Kathy and Tommy finally arrive at Madame's, they find that she lives with Miss Emily, their former headmistress. Miss Emily herself reveals to them that deferrals are no more than an unfounded rumour, one that has continued to resurface no matter how hard she has tried to stamp it out. Why then? Kathy asks. "Why did we do all of that work in the first place? Why train us, encourage us, make us produce all of that? If we're just going to give donations anyway, then die, why all of those lessons? Why all those books and discussions?" (259)

It is appropriate, at this point, to recall Blanchot's claim that the work of art can express no more than the fact, simply, that it *is*. Beyond that, he insists, it expresses nothing. Knowing as we now do that there is no such thing as a deferral, we might expect Miss Emily to impart a final art lesson to her former students: that art can claim to express nothing beyond its own existence; that it can certainly not express the soul of its creator.[17] And even less can it act as a yardstick with which to determine whether or not two people are in love. But Miss Emily says no such thing. Instead, she tells them that Madame took away their art precisely because it would

---

[17] I realise, of course, that Blanchot's view is hardly the view that hermeneutics has always held about art and what it can and cannot reveal. Figures of German Romanticism, such as Wilhelm Dilthey, as Paul Ricoeur has discussed, saw the task of interpretation as one that would allow the reader to better understand the mind of the artist. Paul Ricoeur in fact characterises this aim of Romantic hermeneutics, in terms that mirror those of *Never Let Me Go*, as the "the attempt to grasp the *soul* of an author" (140, emphasis added).

reveal their souls. "Or to put it more finely," as she tells them, "we did it to *prove you had souls at all*" (260).

The loaded implications of the word "soul" are troubling here, and as such the term merits close consideration. I suggest that we begin by reading it as a linguistic relic, a left-over signifier.[18] "Soul," as I see it, operates as a remnant from what, in the novel's time-frame, is a distantly remembered past, a past less permeated by the achievements of medical science. A past, in short, with no clones. A past in which "the great breakthroughs in science followed one after another so rapidly [that] there wasn't time to take stock, to ask the sensible questions" (262). Read thus, "soul" is a term that Miss Emily hopes will return her contemporaries to these questions, and challenge the way the donations program is run in this alternate 1990s England. All around them, Miss Emily tells the students, future donors are reared in "deplorable conditions" that Hailsham students can hardly imagine, being, as they are, part of an experiment designed by Miss Emily to show that if donors are "reared in humane, cultivated environments, it [is] possible for them to grow up as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (261). With the students' art, Miss Emily and Madame have put on "special exhibitions" which they have displayed to those who would rather not think about donors and how they are raised, preferring to believe instead that they were "less than human, so it didn't matter" (263). The exhibitions, Miss Emily had hoped, would defy this denial of the donors' humanity, thus confronting viewers with difficult ethical questions about the responsibilities that human creators might have towards their artificially-created beings: "'There look!' we

---

[18] Language, says Hannah Arendt, stubbornly preserves the distinctions that theory would obstinately neglect. "It is language, and the fundamental human experiences underlying it, rather than theory," says Hannah Arendt, "that teaches us that the things of the world [...] are of a very different nature" (94).

could say. 'Look at this art! How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?'" (262).

Miss Emily's injunction to her contemporaries that they look at her students' art suggests yet a further reading of the term "soul." I view her efforts as an appeal to what Blanchot calls "the other side" of thinking about art. This alternative stance, he suggests, unsettles the attempt to see in the work of art only an object of contemplation, an object whose sufficiency unto itself proclaims that it is of no use in the world. I cite Blanchot again, in full this time:

> Granted, art has as its goal something real: an object. But a beautiful object. Which is to say, an object of contemplation, not of use, which moreover, will be sufficient to itself, will rest in itself, refer to nothing else, and be its own end (in the two senses of the term). True. *And yet, points out the other side of this thinking, the goal of art* <u>*is*</u> *an object – a real, that is, an effective one. Not a momentary dream, a pure inner smile, but a realized action which is itself activating, which informs or deforms others, appeals to them, affects them, moves them – toward other actions which, most often, do not return to art but belong to the course of the world. They contribute to history and thus are lost, perhaps, in history* (212, emphasis added).

Hailsham, Miss Emily's pet project, is founded on the hope that her contemporaries will look at her students' art and glimpse in it something – "soul" – that will compel them to move out of their indifference towards donors. Might not the students' art push all non-donors towards a series of actions that will alter the course of their world, revolutionise the way donations are conducted?

An answer to this question is provided by the fact that by the end of the novel, Hailsham, along with all the other special institutions like it, has been shut down.[19]

---

[19] Miss Emily explains that people's attitude towards Hailsham had changed since a scandal involving James Morningdale, who worked in seclusion in a remote part of Scotland. Morningdale engages in genetic engineering projects whose purpose is to create children who are "demonstrably superior" to humans as they now exist. Horrified at the prospect that this will result in a "generation of children who

But it is not sufficient merely to read Miss Emily's unsuccessful project in her own terms, that is, as a failure that should be attributed to an unforeseeable change in "the climate" of the times (264). In order to fully grasp the brave new world to which *Never Let Me Go* transports us, we must see Miss Emily's experiment, Hailsham, and the work of art which plays such a crucial role in it, as signalling, yet again, to the radical way in which this alternate world reduces *every artifice* to the sphere of utility. And unlike the special treatment that Blanchot and Arendt reserve for it, the world imagined in *Never Let Me Go* does not spare even the work of art of this treatment. For, her good intentions not withstanding, indeed, perhaps because of these same intentions, Miss Emily cannot allow the students' artwork to exist on account of its functionless "intrinsic worth." Rather, this art, as she herself states, must be made to express *proof*. Proof that the students' artwork is *equivalent* to that of non-donors in that it, too, expresses "soul."

I propose that we read "soul" ultimately, then, not as the problematic, vague-yet-essential human quality that Miss Emily's use of it might suggest, but rather as a sort of *currency*. For, if Miss Emily's exhibitions are to succeed, they will do so only insofar as "soul" functions as the yardstick, the measure of equivalence in a system designed to determine in what proportion a clone's work of art can be considered exchangeable for a human's. Ironically, in fact, Tommy and Kathy seem to grasp this from the outset: do they not visit Miss Emily with the conviction that the "souls"

---

would take their place in society," people put a stop to Morningdale. The ensuing climate becomes one of such fear, that people opt to dismantle Hailsham and its sister institutions too. We note yet another allusion to *Frankenstein* here: not only does Victor Frankenstein set out to create his creature's female counterpart on a remote Scottish island; he also destroys his work before it is finished, fearing, as mentioned above, the breed of fearful beings that might ensue from their sexual union.

revealed in their works of art will function as a measure of their compatibility, as a currency with which they will be able to buy time to spend together?

Tommy and Kathy finally leave, knowing that they have finally been told everything. Miss Emily can offer them no deferral, no extra time. She can only remind them that she looked after them during all those years, and gave them, if nothing else, their childhoods, their ability to lose themselves in their art and their writing (268). And yet as readers, I contend, we leave this scene with no option but to face the main literary conceit that Ishiguro weaves into the novel. The meta-fictional discussion about the work of art that occurs in this episode confronts us readers with the work of art that we ourselves are reading, a novel devoid of all mediators, all Miss Emilys who might ask that we probe the narrative in search of its so-called "soul." Ishiguro's novel is one in which he erases himself from the writing process: it is not an omniscient narrator but Kathy herself who addresses us directly in this first person narrative that repeatedly draws attention to itself as such. It is to the interrogation of this special genre that I now turn in order to conclude this chapter.

IV. Science-fiction and autobiography

> *[T]he intended meaning of the text is not essentially the presumed intention of the author, the lived experience of the writer, but rather what the text means for whoever complies with its injunction.*

Paul Ricoeur, "What is a text? Explanation and Understanding", emphasis added

Keith McDonald has suggested that the unruly genre of *Never Let Me Go* is best described as "speculative memoir." Speculative, because, as we have already noted, the novel operates within an alternate world akin to those imagined by science-fiction. And memoir, argues McDonald, because a salient characteristic of *Never Let Me Go* is that the novel employs a series of tropes which recur in autobiographical texts. Perhaps the most obvious of these tropes, he notes, is that of schooling. The accounts of schooling and education that feature so prominently in this novel, observes McDonald, are often equally dominating episodes in autobiography, a factor he explains by suggesting that the "complex power structure" that is the educational institution is often the backdrop against which a narrator can question, understand and frame her agency (77). In other words, education and schooling form a crucial factor in the coming of age narrative that often accompanies the autobiographical account. Kathy's retrospective viewpoint throughout most of this narrative, also in keeping with the temporal structure of most autobiographical accounts, is indeed littered with remarks that confirm McDonald's observations: "Certainly," she says, reflecting on when exactly Hailsham guardians made it clear to them that they would grow up to be donors, "it feels like I *always* knew about donations in some vague way, even as early as six or seven" (83). Or, reflecting on her feelings as she grew older: "In my memory my life at Hailsham falls into two distinct chunks. [...] The earlier years [...] tend to blur into each other as a kind of golden time. [...] But those last years feel different. [...] They were more serious, and in some ways darker" (77).

McDonald further observes that *Never Let Me Go* repeatedly deploys narrative devices that allow Ishiguro to present the novel as an autobiographical account in which Kathy emerges as the authorial voice (79). Thus, Kathy's descriptions of life at Hailsham are often prefaced by comments such as: "I don't know if you had 'collections' where you were" (38). Or, "I don't know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham we had to have some form of medical every week" (13). I agree, up to a point, with McDonald's reading of such meta-referencing, thanks to which "the reader receives the tale as if inhabiting [Kathy's] world of cloning and organ harvesting" (80). Yes, these comments "[stamp] her authentic authorial voice" upon the narrative and draw our attention to Kathy's awareness of "the reader/writer exchange" as McDonald says (79). But I do not believe, as does McDonald, that they "ask us to *bear witness* to [this] dystopian world and the treatment of its victims" (80, emphasis added). A different interpretation is in order if we are to make sense of what McDonald's reading overlooks: namely, that if Kathy's comments enjoin the reader to inhabit the world of cloning, this is because they not only address the reader directly, but do so as if this reader were herself a fellow clone.

"When the fictive author of the preface of *Werther* addresses us, 'and you, good soul...' this 'you' is not the prosaic man who knows that Werther did not exist, but is the 'me' who believes in fiction" says Paul Ricoeur ("Appropriation" 189). This person who believes in the fiction and responds to the injunction of the pronoun 'you' is, of course, none other than the reader. And it is to this reader that *Never Let Me Go*, a novel whose very title harbours an injunction to the 'you,' consistently appeals. What Kathy wants from us readers is not that we witness her victimhood, but that we, through our readership, assume the role of donors if only for the duration of her narrative. Unlike other "speculative memoirs" such as *Frankenstein* or *The*

Handmaid's Tale, with which it might initially elicit comparison, *Never Let Me Go* does not inscribe a fellow-reader into the text.[20] The effect is that we are proscribed from all other forms of identification; no meta-reader arises here to replace us in our role as the receivers of the 'you' with which Kathy addresses us.

What I am suggesting is that *Never Let Me Go* introduces us into an alternative world only to hold it at bay through a narrative style couched in autobiographical tropes and a prose which, as many reviewers have noted, is studiedly banal, stripped of all elements of what Stevens, the butler from Ishiguro's most famous novel, might call "unseemly demonstrativeness."[21] The conspicuous lack of medical or scientific explanations in the text further contributes to conjuring a world that, if alternate, remains strikingly similar to our own. More importantly, however, the relative absence of allusions to technology means that several questions remain doggedly unanswered: who are the organs for? How are the clones kept alive once they begin donating? What organs do they donate? Kathy does not tell us. And she does not, I contend, because this too is part of the narrative strategy with which we are enjoined to identify with the students. On the one level, the withholding of this information is in keeping with the narrative conceit of the novel: Kathy does not need to go into explanations if her addressees are fellow-clones who, like her, know all of this information. But on another level, this lack of information plunges into the experience of the clones, who,

---

[20] *Frankenstein*, for instance, unravels through a series of letters and testimonies in which each narrator asks of his listener-reader only that he receive the tale. No reader – be she the reader *of* the textual fiction or a reader *within* it – is ever asked to identify with any of the narrators. Thus, unlike in *Never Let Me Go*, even the tale of the artificially created creature with whom the clones otherwise show so many parallels, reaches us only through the mediation of his maker, Victor Frankenstein. *The Handmaid's Tale*, on the other hand, inserts a meta-reader into its conclusion, when we learn that the tale we have just read has actually just been recounted as a case-study in a history/anthropology lesson of the future.
[21] Theo Tait, reviewer for the *The Daily Telegraph*, makes this point in his article on *Never Let Me Go* dated March 5, 2005.

throughout their lives, we recall, have been “told and not told” of what their lives hold in store. “[W]e had only the haziest notions of the world outside and about what was and wasn’t possible there” (66). Once we inhabit the readerly role that Kathy carves out for us, this sentence all but erases the distinction between Kathy’s experience and our own.

Stripped of practically all scientific explanations and permeated with autobiographical tropes, *Never Let Me Go* belongs to the genre of science-fiction in an unconventional way. Paradoxically, however, this displacement of the conventions of science-fiction is just what moves the novel into complying all the more forcefully with what Aaron Rosenfield, together with several other critics of science-fiction, has observed about the genre: namely, that it “offer[s] a critique of how we live and who we are now... [it] speak[s] in and to the present, if not of it” (40).[22] Indeed, the generic peculiarities of this novel can be productively read together with Istvan Csicsery-Ronay’s pronouncement that “science fiction has ceased to be a genre per se, [and become] instead, a mode of awareness about the world.”

Csicsery-Ronay’s comments, of course, pertain, at some level, to all fictional texts. This is precisely the point that Ricoeur makes when he observes that, “In playful representation, ‘what is emerges.’ But ‘what is’ is no longer what we call everyday reality; or rather, reality truly becomes reality, that is, something which comprises a future horizon of undecided possibilities, something to fear or hope for, something unsettled” (“Appropriation” 187) Science fiction, however, takes us even further away from everyday reality than do other fictional genres, not by allowing a future horizon

[22] In his book on science-fiction, Robert Adams cites several critics who hold this same view.

of undecided possibilities to *emerge* through the reading process, but by placing the reader decidedly *within* such a future.

I propose, then, that we read *Never Let Me Go* as a "mode of awareness about the world" in which we are enjoined to think about a future world which, given the rapid developments in biotechnology and biomedical science, might not be so far removed from everyday reality. What, the novel asks, is the relationship of the artificially created clone to the human being who produced it? What kind of life is the clone entitled to? Indeed, is it entitled to anything? Let us hang on to these questions of a possible future horizon as we travel *back* in time. Our stop? The year 1951, which witnessed two events of crucial relevance to the concerns of this chapter. January of 1951 saw Frenchman René Küss perform the first transplant of an *unrelated* living donor kidney.[23] Although his patient died one month later, his pioneering method remains, to this day, the standard kidney transplantation procedure (Cinqualbre and Kahan, 3020). In this same year, Hannah Arendt published an essay in which she wrote about the plight of refugees in a manner that resonates remarkably with the dilemma posed by *Never Let Me Go*: "This new situation," she warned, "[...] would mean in this context that the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself" ("Decline of the Nation-State" 178).

In conclusion, I want to re-quote Kathy's question: "if we're just going to give donations anyway, then *die*, why all those lessons?" Die, we note, not "complete." After her fantasy of holding a child, her search for possibles, and her request for a

---

[23] I emphasise "unrelated" as the operative word here because, given their artificial origins, the donors of *Never Let Me Go* are unrelated to the recipients of their organs in a much more radical sense. The issue of unrelatedness, moreover, is just what the novel asks us to interrogate.

deferral, this change of terminology constitutes Kathy's final appeal to non-donors for the right to have rights. The response she receives finds echo, yet again, in Hannah Arendt: "It is by no means certain whether this is possible" (*ibid*).

Conclusion

IMAGINING THE FUTURE

Politically correct metropolitan multiculturalists want the world's others to be identitarians: nationalist (Jameson) or class (Ahmad). To undo this binary demand is to suggest that peripheral literature may stage more surprising and unexpected maneuvers toward collectivity.

Gayatri Spivak, Death of a Discipline

I

In these concluding remarks, I should like to tease out the implications of the constellation of texts and readings that I have thus far laid out in my project. What lessons, I want to ask, do my chosen texts contain for the specific disciplinary field which I inhabit: postcolonial literary studies? The statement in my epigraph, taken from Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*, itself a reflection on disciplinarity, serves my purpose well here, for it invokes all three of the issues I shall be addressing in this final chapter.

Spivak's first sentence gestures towards postcolonial studies, a field explicitly concerned with "the world's others" and the processes that led to them becoming so. That Spivak does not explicitly name postcolonial studies, however, is significant: indeed, I wish to read her silence as indicative of a certain suspicion of the term 'postcolonial' that is increasingly characteristic of critics both sympathetic and skeptical of the methodologies and claims of postcolonial studies.[1] The sentence is

---

[1] Admittedly, it is hard to imagine a time, especially since its consolidation, that postcolonial studies has *not* been subject to intense critical scrutiny from both its practitioners and its detractors. However, I am not referring to the familiar objections to the 'post' in postcolonial or the privileging of 'colonial' in order to understand the past. I have in mind a particular set of objections to postcolonial studies, articulated in the last decade, where postcolonial critics themselves have asked whether the field has outlived its critical or political usefulness. This, for example, is the motivating impulse behind the anthology *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005).

equally striking for its provocative pairing of Jameson and Ahmad as like-minded identitarians, a ground-clearing gesture that allows Spivak, in the second sentence of my epigraph, to make claims for the other two issues this conclusion will address: the specific qualities of literature, and its corollary ability to stage non-identitarian models of collectivity.

We note that Spivak's chosen adjective to describe the literature that is best able to stage this collectivity is, in keeping with her aversion to the term 'postcolonial', "*peripheral*." And yet, in her essay, she goes on to discuss this staging of collectivity in the novels of two writers whose status in the canon of postcolonial studies is, if not overly extolled, hardly peripheral: Tayeb Salih and Mahasweta Devi. We must, however, interpret this second deliberate gesture as alluding to the dangers that lurk behind the desire of the "politically correct metropolitan multiculturalist" to see postcolonial studies academically consolidated in the form of optional modules that a humanities student can choose to take as part of her degree.

Such a desire, as Neil Lazarus and many others have pointed out, has meant that "literary scholars working in the field have tended to write with reference to a woefully restricted and attenuated corpus of works" usually written in a European language (English or French), and allowing only "a certain, very specific and very restricted kind of reading to be staged through reference to them" (424). Readings, Lazarus goes on to explain, that endlessly invoke discussions of nationalism as imagined community and tirelessly reveal history to be a master narrative that only produces domination (ibid). On the one hand, then, Spivak's choice of Salih and Devi, who write in Arabic and Bengali, respectively, works to undercut the bias towards Anglo- and Francophone texts that reduces the ethical potential of postcolonial studies to little more than "putting some black in the Union Jack" (9). To choose to read Salih

and Devi is to foreground, instead, the need to "take the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant" (ibid).

Despite what my corpus of decidedly Anglophone texts might suggest, I sympathise entirely with Spivak's proposal. I nevertheless want to stand by my Anglophone texts, in the conviction that although (because?) they too are peripheral to the canon of postcolonial studies, they have many insights to offer those of us working in the field, especially if we do so, at least partly, in/with European languages. If I open myself up to the charge of defensiveness by justifying myself thus, perhaps a closer look at the additional reason behind Spivak's choice of texts will serve to clear me."Salih's narrator," says Spivak only a few paragraphs after my epigraphic sentences, "will remain a vehicle of the undecidable. *I am suggesting that we should allow peripheral literature this prerogative, not read it with some foregone conclusions that deny it literariness*" (58, emphasis added).

Here, again, we are made aware of the conspicuous substitution of the term "peripheral" for 'postcolonial.' This time, however, the implied charge against postcolonial literary studies seems to be its lack of attention to literariness, a charge which Spivak is by no means unjustified, or alone, in making. Consider, for instance, the inaugural issue of the postcolonial studies journal *Interventions*, published in 1999. Its general editor, Robert Young, makes in it the following remarks: "Postcolonial writing, together with minority writing in the west and feminist writing generally, has achieved a revolution in aesthetics and aesthetic criteria of the literary. […] *Writing is now valued as much for its depiction of representative minority experience as for its*

aesthetic qualities" (4, emphasis added).[2] I will return to the question of value, one of the chief preoccupations of this project, shortly. For now, I will simply reproduce the critique that an unsympathetic, even scathing reading of this comment might engender: namely, that it seems to offer an apology for postcolonial literature's lack of aesthetic qualities by offering as consolation the claim that its importance lies, rather, in its ability to reflect the experiences of national or global minorities. Young's remarks certainly show that "postcolonial criticism is largely grounded in mimetic presuppositions about literature" (Ramazani, 2). Yet, more problematically, Young also risks offering us a prescriptive notion of what postcolonial literature should be. As Harrison puts it:

> [Young] seems to suggest that the contemporary reader (/student) will be turning to the text for a view of and information about a 'minority' culture (most often, presumably, someone else's) and that the text's 'depiction' of experience will be taken to be reliable and authoritative; and this in turn may suggest that the author has a responsibility to write reliably in this way (4).

Harrison concludes his article, which refers extensively and sympathetically to Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*, by stating that "[t]he critic or theorist, *even in a field such as postcolonial studies*, needs to go beyond the search for depictions of representative minority experience, if she or he wishes to deal with the literary at all" (15, emphasis added). The italicised phrase is of interest to me because it is symptomatic of a telling hesitation. A hesitation to be expected, perhaps, from a critic sympathetic to the ethical and political project of postcolonial studies. A hesitation that stems from the desire to make literature and its study a political endeavour, from

---

[2] Nick Harrison and Deepika Bahri draw on this same example in their respective exploration of the vexed issue of the role of the aesthetic in postcolonial literature. See Harrison's "Who Needs an Idea of the Literary?" and Bahri's introduction to *Native Intelligence*.

the conviction that any responsible writer from a formerly colonised region of the globe should want to explore the injustices of colonialism and the suffering and/or displacement it engendered.

Significantly, it is just this hesitation that Spivak wants to do away with. For the literary critic, she suggests, justice is first and foremost a reading strategy, an ethical imperative to *do justice to the text* and to the qualities of literariness that give it its specificity. And this injunction applies equally, if not more, to the critic of postcolonial (peripheral) literature. For, perhaps more than any other subfield of literary studies, postcolonial studies expresses an unquestioned faith in the political efficacy of literature. More than any other discipline, therefore, it reads in search of the minority experience, values a text on the grounds that it provides examples from what would otherwise remain an unfamiliar culture or history and combs a work for signs of a pre-established set of criteria symptomatic of postcoloniality.

Spivak's argument for literariness finds echoes, most audibly, in the work of her contemporary, Derek Attridge. Attridge's *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2004a) takes on a writer whose work has been read extensively by postcolonial critics. Like Spivak, Attridge warns of the dangers of literary interpretations that "mov[e] too quickly beyond the [text] to find its significance elsewhere, of treating it not as inventive literary work drawing us into unfamiliar emotional and cognitive territory but as a reminder of what we already know too well" (Attridge 2004a, 43). Unlike Spivak, Attridge articulates his argument for literariness in terms that resonate suggestively with the body of texts that this dissertation deals with, and it is to his work that I will briefly turn before revisiting, in the second half of this chapter, a further aspect of Spivak's argument.

Attridge's main quarrel is with an approach to literature that he terms "instrumental." An instrumental reading "could be crudely summarised as the treating of a text (or other cultural artefact) as a means to a predetermined end: coming to the object with the hope or the assumption that it can be instrumental in furthering an existing project, and responding to it in such a way as to test, or even produce that usefulness" (Attridge 2004b, 7). Instrumental attitudes in literary studies, says Attridge, "have been highly productive" (ibid), not least because they have allowed the literary critic to find a place for literature in political struggles. Attridge is highly aware, in other words, of the counter-accusations that might be levelled against his critique of instrumentalism by postcolonial critics who, like Harrison, might hesitate in the face of being labelled apolitical. Attridge's response to such apprehensiveness, like Spivak's, is categorical: there simply is no room for this kind of hesitation. "[L]iterature, understood in its difference from other kinds of writing (and other kinds of reading), solves no problems and saves no souls […] [I]ts effects are not predictable enough to serve a political or moral program" (Attridge 2004b, 4).[3]

Postcolonial studies today, Spivak and Attridge suggest, needs to come to terms with the fact that its principal object of study, the literary, "is not a blueprint to be followed in unmediated social action" (Spivak, 23).[4] Indeed, "as soon as art

---

[3] In the context of my discussion of *Never Let Me Go* it is highly significant that Attridge uses the word 'soul' here. It allows for a reading of Ishiguro's novel as a meditation on instrumentality and the human artifice. The coming-of-age narrative traces how Tommy and Kathy H learn that they embody the epitome of instrumentality, where the difference between two sorts of human artifices – clones such as themselves, and art works such as the ones they produce – has been all but erased. Clones are used instrumentally, to save or prolong lives. Their art work, as they learn from Miss Emily, is used instrumentally, as evidence for the fact that the 'students' have souls.

[4] I realise that Spivak's book deals with the discipline of comparative literature, and that *The Singularity of Literature*, the book by Attridge that I move on to discuss, deals with a general notion of the literary. I have chosen, however, to focus only on what their arguments allow us to say about postcolonial studies, a move that finds support in the fact that postcolonial critics such as Deepika Bahri, Nicholas

measures itself against action, immediate and pressing action can only put it in the wrong" (Blanchot, 213). The first task of the postcolonial literary critic is to recognise that this admission can be *enabling*. Only then will she be able to approach the literary text as a *creation* that demands to be read for its literariness, rather than as a *product* to be instrumentally combed for its usefulness in "furthering an existing project." To approach a text as a creation is to be open to the "coming-into-being of the hitherto unexampled," to be willing to be drawn into the unknown and the unfamiliar (Attridge 2004b, 149). It is to understand, in other words, that art is the practice "that can never be justified yet upon which justice can be founded" (Blanchot, 215).

The issue of instrumentality, of attempting to *do justice* to the text, has proved especially difficult in a project such as this one, whose very choice of texts obeys a somewhat instrumental logic. My claim, however, is that in order to explore the commodification of the human body that biotechnology now facilitates, literature plays a role as crucial as that of anthropology and medical ethics precisely *because* it does not solve any problems. Like anthropological and bioethical studies, my chosen texts highlight the difficult moral issues that surround the possibility of organ transfer, although they do so by staging fictional situations which project us into possibly unfamiliar emotional territory without offering a set of possible alternatives. To accept this is not to suggest that literature is irrevocably disassociated from the ethico-political. Rather, it is to claim that the role of literature in a project such as this is to constantly signal to its own logic, a logic upon which justice might be founded. If the literary work, as Attridge reminds us, always "puts us under a certain obligation […] to translate the work into our own terms while remaining aware of the necessary

---

Harrison, Graham Huggan, Neil Lazarus, and Robert Young engage with the issues raised by Attridge and Spivak, and, at times, refer directly to them.

betrayal that this invokes," in the specific case of this project, the literary works I discuss also act as a constant ethical reminder of the dangers of the very instrumentality they thematise (Attridge 2004b, 120). The place of the literary work, then, is to stand as a constant counterpoint to the coveted, transplantable organ: the literary work is the human artifice whose existence can defy instrumentality. It signals, in a quasi-utopian gesture, to its ability to remain outside the instrumental logic which has even made the human organ – a thing naturally given and constantly, if incidentally, reproduced by human labour – into an alienable object pressed into the service of commodified life prolongment. To value literature for its ability to signal to a space beyond instrumentality, then, is to understand value non-instrumentally, that is, as an experience that exists "*beyond rationality and measured productivity*" (Attridge 2000, 109).

To learn this lesson from my chosen corpus of texts, is to learn how to re-read certain episodes in them as signaling to just this sort of non-instrumental logic. It is to see Jaya's call for "real weight on top of her" and her definition of "winning by losing" at *Harvest*'s conclusion as a defiant demand that flies in the face of premeditated risk assessment and rational calculations. It is to read the unconsummated love affair of Senay and Okwe in *Dirty Pretty Things* as a willed proscription of love from the plane of calculated exchange, and to find in the tragedy of Kathy and Tommy's realization that their love will *not* buy them time, a similar gesture of proscription from the sphere of rational exchange. It is to offer, in short, a response to global capitalism, to its "imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere" (Spivak, 72).

I have more to say for what my texts can teach us, however. For it is not just the instrumental logic of capital that they counter in these gestures. They also respond

directly to Spivak, and her call for the kind of non-identitarian models of collectivity which postcolonial studies has not, as yet, been able to imagine.

II

I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. […] The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan.

Gayatri Spivak, Death of a Discipline

I began this chapter with an epigraph from Spivak that suited my purposes because it foregrounded all the issues I wanted to evoke. I choose this second citation, however, to highlight a notable omission on her part. Spivak's invocation of Planetarity, a term that can accommodate alterity in a way that globality cannot, is particularly striking to me because the departure from globality is advocated in terms of *information* technology. Spivak goes on to spell out and clarify this invocation of IT for us: "It is often pointed out," she says, "that globalisation, in the form of ancient world systems, has a long history. This historical reckoning remains crucial to our task. In the relatively autonomous economic sphere, however, information technology has also created a rupture – hence my invocation of the computerised globe" (73). My own concern in this project has been to interrogate the role of *biotechnology* in the processes of globalisation. To me, then, Spivak's description of the planet as the space which we *inhabit*, immediately evokes environmental and ecological concerns and "ruptures" that fall within the purview not of *information* technology but of *bio*technology.

In response to this omission, I propose a return to Paul Gilroy, whose *Against Race* was published in the year 2000, the very same year in which Spivak gave the Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory that she later revised for publication in

2003's *Death of a Discipline*. Gilroy's text is instructive to read alongside Spivak's: if the final chapter of his book invokes, as does the final chapter of Spivak's book, a notion of the planetary, his argument, unlike Spivak's, unfolds with constant reference to the biological sciences.[5] What is more: Gilroy turns to developments in biotechnology and the biological sciences in order to advocate his own vision of a non-identitarian collectivity.

Gilroy's move against race is a ground-clearing gesture, in fact, that operates in a similar fashion to Spivak's gesture of reading Ahmad and Jameson as like-minded identitarians.[6] From the outset of *Against Race*, Gilroy is at pains to point out that "the demise of 'race' is nothing to be feared" (12). It is imperative, instead, to forego raciological thinking, not only *because* of the political injustices that have been carried out in its name, but, equally importantly, *in spite of* the reappropriation of raciological thinking to turn it into an "important source of solidarity, joy, and collective strength" (ibid). Recognising that "[w]hen ideas of racial particularity are inverted in this defensive manner they become difficult to relinquish," Gilroy, too, is categorical in claiming that there can be no hesitation on this matter. To let go of raciological thinking, even in its defensive, empowering versions, is to open oneself up to other, more inclusive models of collectivity:

> The recurrence of pain, disease, humiliation and loss of dignity, grief, and care for those one loves can all contribute to an abstract sense of human similarity powerful enough to make solidarities based on cultural particularities appear suddenly trivial (17).

---

[5] The last chapter of *Against Race* is entitled "'Third Stone from the Sun': Planetary Humanism and Strategic Universalism"; the last chapter of *Death of a Discipline* is "Planetarity."

[6] Spivak finds similar faults in ethnic studies and postcolonial studies: the former clings to "the authority of experience"(76); the latter has moved from being concerned with "mere nationalism over against colonialism" to "metropolitan multiculturalism," concerned mainly with "political settlements that took place after the decolonisation of former European colonies" (81-2).

I must point to a final important similarity between Gilroy and Spivak before moving on to a consideration of how the literary texts I have considered in this project respond to both thinkers. The similarity concerns what we might call the temporality, the grammatical tense, in which Gilroy and Spivak envision such collectivities. If it is to respond to the most ethical of calls contained in literature, namely, the possibility literature harbours of imagining alternative collectivities, then, argues Spivak, the discipline of literary studies needs "to acknowledge a definitive future anteriority, a 'to come'-ness, a 'will have happened' quality" (6). Consider, now, the following statement, taken from Gilroy's concluding chapter, in which he reflects on the aims of his argument against race. Thus decontextualised, it almost reads as a direct address to Spivak:

> My own desire to see the end of raciology means that I, too, have invoked the unknowable future against the unforgiving present. In doing this, I urge a fundamental change of mood upon what used to be called anti-racism. It has been asked in an explicitly utopian spirit to terminate its ambivalent relationship to the idea of race in the interest of a heterocultural, postanthropological and cosmopolitan yet-to-come (334).

If we want to respond to raciological thinking in a way that moves beyond the identitarian call for a "corrective or compensatory inclusion in modernity," Gilroy adds, "we need self-consciously to become more *future-oriented*" (335, emphasis added).

Spivak and Gilroy map out postcolonial studies as a discipline that has always been at pains to grapple with the problem of collectivity. Initially concerned with the reappropriation of raciological thinking and the countering of colonialism with nationalism, today, however, the field needs to see itself as a project concerned with imagining a form of collectivity which is impossible to predict, a task for which Spivak turns to the literary, and Gilroy, to science. Considered collectively, it is just to

this injunction to embrace the unknowable future that *Harvest*, *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Never Let me Go* respond. They do so, on the one hand, by tracing the problem of collectivity in postcolonial studies along a similar path to the one traced by Gilroy and Spivak. Consider the sequential order in which the texts occur in this project: *Harvest* responds well to an understanding of postcoloniality as based on identitarian, racial thinking. Not only do the play's stage directions specify that "[i]t matters only that there be a highly recognisable distinction between the two groups [Donors and Receivers], reflected in clothing and appearance" (Padmanabhan, 217); this difference is conceived of at the level of developmental progress, evidenced by the constant references to the lack of hygiene and amenities in the Donor world. That this lack is remedied by the constant imposition of high-tech gadgets by the Receivers recalls, of course, the bringing of trains, telegraphs and modern infrastructure to the Indian subcontinent by the British during the Raj. *Dirty Pretty Things* shifts the focus to the former metropole and the immigrant communities residing there. There is a concomitant shift towards questions of citizenship and to issues of mobility and the lack thereof, signaled to, as we have seen, by juxtaposing the hospitality industry catering to freely moving tourists, and the hospitality that a sovereign nation might extend to its immigrants. *Never Let me Go* places us in a sort of future that never happened, in a parallel present that transpires in a contemporary rural England in which we recognise nothing and in which all familiar markers of identity (race, class, nationality) are erased in order to foreground the very issue of future collectivities that Spivak and Gilroy diagnose as the most urgent question for postcolonial studies today: what, all three of them ask, constitutes that which is specifically and uniquely human?[7]

---

[7] Spivak's version of this question, given her concern with the literary humanities, is "who crawls into

On the other hand, however, the texts offer a much more critical response to both thinkers. They do so by signaling to a very different set of concerns that emerge from the "'will have happened' quality" of the future and the call for a more "future-oriented" approach to community that Spivak and Gilroy respectively invoke. The call for future-orientedness, after all, acquires altogether different resonances when understood in the context in which all three texts operate, that of commodified transplantation and life prolongment technologies. What else drives the life stories of Om, Jaya, Okwe, Senay, Kathy H and Tommy if not their orientation towards a better future? The poignancy of their stories, however, lies in the fact that the future appears increasingly as a domain of decidedly *unequal* access. What these texts teach us, then, is how the capitalism that Spivak, to her credit, never loses sight of, and the biotechnological developments that Gilroy, to his credit, pays close attention to, actually work together to profit from the hopes towards a better future that we *all* have. Their thematisation of organ transplantation signals towards a collectivity, in effect, predicated upon newly recognised similarities that are used to replicate the old patterns of exploitation. If the old patterns of exploitation were legitimised by a series of discourses evoking difference, not least the discourse of raciological thinking, then this exploitation is enabled, ironically, by discourses evoking equivalence: medical drugs, as Lawrence Cohen reminds us, suppress immunological difference, and global capitalism rests on the firm belief in the voluntary exchange of economically quantifiable equivalences.

---

the place of the 'human' in' humanism'?" (23) Gilroy, as we saw in the introduction, asks this question after a consideration of biotechnology and science, which informs, we note, his choice of terminology: We […] are now obliged to ask on what *scale* human sameness and human diversity are to be *calibrated* (47, emphasis added).

These texts never cease to remind us that the hubris inspired by biotechnology is a fundamental consideration for us if we are to retain the humility aspired to in Spivak's salutary reminder that we inhabit the planet, on loan. They caution us, therefore, to be alert to that which Spivak omits from her discussion, albeit a discussion whose claims for the literary are ultimately very suggestive for this project, as I have indicated in the first section of this chapter. More importantly, perhaps, they introduce a level of caution into Gilroy's joyous embracing of biotechnology's role in the postracial future to come. It is this same cautionary note that I have found to be so prescient in the work of Hannah Arendt, to which I refer so extensively in this project.

Significantly, Gilroy himself draws on Arendt's work in his *Against Race*. For a project like Gilroy's, which both highlights the antinomies of modernity and urges us, "its custodians, [to] fulfill the promises made in the luminous rhetoric that helped constitute it", Arendt's prescience lies in her ability to respond to the "moral obligation to consider the connections that might exist between the genocidal terrors perpetrated inside Europe and the patterns of colonial and imperial slaughter that preceded them under Europe's colours" (75-76). For a project like my own, however, Arendt's work, most particularly *The Human Condition*, is invaluable precisely because she is at pains to grapple with the thorny question of just what it might mean to be human, a question she approaches by interrogating the hubristic tendency of science to overcome our embodied, "merely given" existence on this planet.

Gilroy is undoubtedly justified in signaling to the *potential* for human collectivity contained in the "international and therefore necessarily 'transracial' trade in internal organs and other body parts for transplant" (20). I read him as asking us to shift our focus away from Cohen's argument that immunosuppressant drugs like cyclosporine globalise by *suppressing* difference. Gilroy asks us, instead, to

concentrate on the fact that the event of accepting a transracial organ into one's body is a significant transformation in our social imaginaries, and hence an important step towards a postracial future. It is in this decidedly utopian spirit that he chooses to read not just scientific developments, but the fiction that thematises these same developments. Twice in the conclusion to *Against Race*, Gilroy examines science-fiction. The first reference is to 1931's *Black No More*, the first sci-fi novel to be published by a Black Atlantic writer. The story, Gilroy tells us, centres on the invention of a machine for turning black people into whites. He continues:

> It is especially significant for our ethical purposes that the protagonist's first major action after undergoing his change of race is to enlist in the ranks of a vicious white supremacist organization, the Knights of Nordica. *Once again, science, technology, and progress expand the field of immorality. They multiply available opportunities for doing the wrong thing* (349).

Gilroy is clearly impatient with this neo-Luddite, dystopian view of science, and eager to reclaim science for his argument *against* race. Thus, his second reference to sci-fi mentions more recent films such as *Independence Day* or *Men in Black*. Recognising that the transethnic bonding that occurs in these films is made possible only because of the greater dangers represented by aliens and other threatened planetary conquests, he argues that such a view points only to "the radical powerlessness produced by a chronic inability to reduce the salience of racial divisions in social, economic and cultural life" (354). Accordingly, he then goes on to put forth a decidedly more "hopeful" reading (ibid):

> [I]t is impossible to overlook the fact that this crop of movies expresses real and widespread hunger for a world that is undivided by the petty differences we retain and inflate by calling them racial. These films seek to celebrate how the desire to retain those outmoded principles of differentiation recedes when it confronts more substantive varieties of otherness and forms of life that are truly other-worldly (355).

True, my entire corpus of texts might be read as a series of fables whose messages unfold along similar lines to that of Gilroy's reading of *Black No More*. All of them, in other words, might be read as alerting us to the ways in which science increases the potential for unethical actions and Gilroy might well see in them only tired re-articulations of pessimism and fear. My own view, however, is that this sort of reading fails to do justice to the texts, primarily because these texts, despite initial appearances, do not try to preserve raciological thinking in the ways that Gilroy, with science as his model, wants to move beyond. By an explicit visual marking of racial difference, *Harvest* and *Dirty Pretty Things* remind us, rather, that the transcendence of race, ideologically speaking, does not entail a raceless future, *practically* speaking. To acknowledge this is to recognise that the social realities created by a long tradition of raciological thinking are very much with us in the *present*.[8] It is for this reason that Padmanabhan feels the need to retain a sense of racial difference between the donors and receivers of her play, and for this reason too, that Sr Juan is able to confidently say to Okwe that if he were just "some African, the deal would be simple."

More importantly, however, we must remember that all three texts focus on a particular process enabled by a specific form of existing scientific technology:

---

[8] Gilroy is by no means oblivious to this problem. Witness his reference to the following comments by Martin Luther King:

> Without denying the value of scientific endeavour, there is a striking absurdity in committing billions to reach the moon where no people live, while only a fraction of that amount is appropriated to service the densely populated slums. If these strange views persist, in a few years we can be assured that when we set a man on the moon, with an adequate telescope he will be able to see the slums on earth with their intensified congestion, decay and turbulence. On what scale of values is this a program of progress?

To this sense that "the gap between social and technological progress was now so deep that it called the very idea of social and economic progress into question", however, Gilroy responds with the observation that this awareness, too, is belied by a simultaneous interest in futurology and extraterrestiality, even on the part of Dr King, who was a faithful follower of *Star Trek* and an admirer of Uhura, the black female character played by Nichelle Nichols (346).

immunologically unrestricted, hence inter-racial and inter-familial, transplant. As such, the plots of all texts are in some sense *predicated* on the notion of postraciality. *Harvest's* villain, Virgil, obviously cares little about race if he is happy to incorporate all of Jeetu's organs into himself. *Dirty Pretty Things* understands the postracial nature of organ transfer to the point of centering the film's climactic revenge upon Sr. Juan on the commodified organ's very racelessness. And *Never Let Me Go*, as I have already mentioned, situates us in a parallel postracial present, signaling to the insignificance of race by its complete lack of acknowledgement of the issue. In fact, these texts are explicitly concerned with the fact that political inequality is, effectively, no longer raciologically justified. Their concern with transplant technology shows us, too, that we can no longer say with the confidence of Hannah Arendt in 1958 that "political equality is the very opposite of our equality before death." Rather, they teach us that political inequality, as well as inequality before death, is legitimized with an appeal to the instrumental logic whose workings are mapped out so compellingly by Hannah Arendt. It is an instrumental logic that creates donors-sellers, as *Harvest* and *Dirty Pretty Things* show us, in the form of willing or unwilling commodifiers of the organ mysteriously given to them, an organ which their labour incidentally reproduces and for which there is an increasing, predatory demand. It is an instrumental logic that culminates, as *Never Let Me Go* shows us, in having to manufacture an artificial other, a clone, whose organs can be taken because it exists solely to fulfill this purpose. We would do well here to recall Paul Gilroy's reading of the aliens of contemporary films who, because they constitute "more substantive varieties of otherness and forms of life that are truly other-worldly" allow for the surfacing of postracial collectivities. *Never Let Me Go* forecloses this escape route enabled by the possibility of an absolute other, the "truly other-worldly." Kathy H and Tommy, we recall, exist because they have

been made by *us*: they are a decidedly *human* artifice. Collectively, then, the three texts pose a difficult question of Gilroy: is there really so much cause for celebration in biotechnology's creation of racelessness? Surely, they ask, the issue of racelessness only returns us all the more urgently to Gilroy's own question: in order to imagine a non-identitarian collective future, how are human sameness and diversity to be calibrated?

III

Proplepsis*: noun.* ***1.*** *Rhet. the anticipation and answering of possible objections in rhetorical speech.* ***2.*** *anticipation.* ***3.*** *the representation of a thing as existing before it actually does or did so.*

OED

I have already referred, above, to an essay by Neil Lazarus published in 2005. Significantly entitled "The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism," the essay laments, as we saw, the restricted, predictable set of texts and interpretations that characterise postcolonial studies in its current incarnation. In order to try and envisage a critical alternative to a postcolonial studies that does not do justice to its ethical potential, Lazarus turns to debates on literary modernism, whose politics have also been the subject of much debate. Embarking on a critical reading of both Raymond Williams's *The Politics of Modernism* and Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism; Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Lazarus claims to be equally unpersuaded by Williams's argument that modernism addressed only a "highly selected version of the modern which then offer[ed] to appropriate the whole of modernity" (Williams, cited in Lazarus 429) and Jameson's argument that "modernism's criticality has been neutralized" (Lazarus, 430). Neither critic, says Lazarus, seems to allow for the possibility that "there might be a certain kind of modernist writing *after* the

canonisation of modernism – a writing that is to say, that resists the accommodationism of what has been canonised as modernism and that does what at least some modernist work has done from the outset: namely, says 'no'; refuses integration, resolution, consolation, comfort; protests and criticises" (431). This, however, is what postcolonial writing, at its best, is able to do.

Next, Lazarus proposes a term for understanding "the conceptual underpinnings of [this] particular *kind* of writing, [this] particular *mode* of literary practice" that says 'no' (432). "*Disconsolation*," he says, "is the project of this writing, its deepest aesthetic (hence indirectly social) aspiration" (ibid).[9] I want to claim this term – disconsolation – for all three texts which I have considered in this project, texts whose Anglophone-ness banishes them from Spivak's category of "peripheral literature" and whose critical stance towards technology leaves them vulnerable to Gilroy's charge of pessimism and dystopian neo-Luddism. Disconsolation, on the other hand, allows us to read *Harvest*, *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Never Let Me Go* as critiques motivated by disconsolation's chief characteristic: its "yearning for fellowship or collectivity" (ibid).

We might well object to Lazarus's desire to see postcolonial literature as the custodian of literary modernism. I leave a detailed critique of this move to those who are more qualified to articulate it. I offer only a final thought in conclusion. It refers back to the dictionary definition that is my epigraph for this section, and pertains only to the three texts that have been my concern in this project: rather than modernist, I want to suggest, all texts I consider here are *proleptic*. This adjective, of course, can be applied to all works of art insofar as art is able to gesture towards what is to-come

---

[9] Significantly, Lazarus's chief example of the aesthetic of disconsolation is none other than Kazuo Ishiguro (432).

(Schlemon, 217). *Harvest*, *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Never Let Me Go*, however, *literalise* the rhetorical figure that is prolepsis: the entire narrative and plot of these texts centres on representing an existing technology in order to anticipate the uses to which it has not (yet) been put. Prolepsis, as it occurs in these texts, asks us to do more than imagine what is to-come. Rather, it puts forward a *not-yet* whose message is two-fold: to imagine what is yet to come and to anticipate in this the kind of world we do *not* want.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agamben, Giorgio. Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Alkon, Paul K. Science Fiction before 1900 : Imagination Discovers Technology. New York : Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994.

Amago, Samuel. "Why Spaniards Make Good Bad Guys: Sergi López and the Persistence of the Black Legend in Contemporary European Cinema." Film Criticism 30:1 (2005): 41-63.

Anonymous. "The City's Secret Heartbeat." http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2002/12/13/bfss13.xml Last accessed on 22/2/2007

Appadurai, Arjun. The Social Life of Things. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.

Arendt, Hannah. "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man." Imperialism: Part Two of The Origins of Totalitarianism. New York: Harvest, 1994.

---. The Human Condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Attridge, Derek. "Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." Novel 34:1 (2000): 98-121.

---. "J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*: Introduction." Interventions 4:3 (2002): 315-20.

---. J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004a

---. The Singularity of Literature. London: Routledge, 2004b.

Atwood, Margaret. The Handmaid's Tale. London: Vintage, 1998.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "Ageing and the Sociology of Embodiment." Modernity, Medicine and Health – Medical Sociology towards 2000. Ed. Graham Scambler and Paul Higgs. London/New York: Routledge, 1998. 216-33.

Bauman, Zygmunt. Life in Fragments : Essays in Postmodern Morality. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Bay, Michael. The Island. Warner Brothers, 2005.

Blanchot, Maurice. The Space of Literature. Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 1982.

Bradshaw, Peter. "*Dirty Pretty Things*: Review." http://arts.guardian.co.uk/fridayreview/story/0,,858664,00.html Last accessed on 22/2/2007.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Mothers, Monsters and Machines." Writing on the Body – Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory. Ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 59-80.

Burrell, Ian. "Prejudice feared as asylum-seekers receive ID cards." The Independent. Feb 1: 2002.

Canguilhem, Georges. On the Normal and the Pathological. Boston: D. Reidel Pub. Co, 1978.

Canovan, Margaret. Hannah Arendt : A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Cherry, Mark. Kidney for Sale by Owner. Washington D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2005.

Cinqualbre, J and B.D. Kahan. "René Küss: Fifty Years of Retroperitoneal Placement of Renal Transplants." Transplantation Proceedings 34 (2002): 3019-3025.

Clarke, Adele et al. "Biomedicalization: Technoscientific Transformations of Health, Illness, and U.S. Biomedicine." American Sociological Review (Albany) 68.2 (2003): 161.

Cohen, Lawrence. “The Other Kidney: Biopolitics beyond Recognition.” Commodifying Bodies. Ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Loïc Wacquant. London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002. 9-30.

---. “Operability: Surgery at the Margins of the State.” Anthropology in the Margins of the State. Ed. Veena Das and Deborah Poole. Santa Fé: School of American Research Press, 2004.

Comarroff, Jean and John Comaroff. “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming.” Public Culture 12:2 (2000): 291-343.

Davis, Emily. “The Intimacies of Globalization: Bodies and Borders On-Screen.” Camera Obscura 21:2 (2006): 33-73.

Davis-Floyd, Robbie and Joseph Dumit, Ed. Cyborg Babies : From Techno-Sex to Techno-Tots. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Derrida, Jacques. “Hostipitality.” Angelaki 5:3 (2000a): 3-18.

---. Of Hospitality. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000b.

---. “The Principle of Hospitality.” Parallax 11:1 (2005): 6-9.

Duster, Troy. Backdoor to Eugenics. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. “The Genres of Postcolonialism.” Social Text 22:1 (2004): 1-15.

Foster, Kevin. “New Faces, Old Fears: Migrants, Asylum Seekers and British Identity.” Third Text 20:6 (2006):683-691.

Foucault, Michel. Society must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76. Bertani, Mauro Fontana, Alessandro Ewald and François Macey, Ed. New York: Picador, 2003.

---. The History of Sexuality. New York: Vintage Books, 1990-.

---. Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Fox, Renée and Judith Swazey. The Courage to Fail : A Social View of Organ Transplants and Dialysis. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002.

---. Spare Parts: Organ Replacement in American Society. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Franklin, Sarah. Dolly Mixtures: The Remaking of Genealogy. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

---. Global Nature, Global Culture. Celia Stacey and Lury Jackie Ed. London: SAGE, 2000.

Frears, Stephen. Dirty Pretty Things. BBC Films. London: 2003.

French, Philip. "Frears finds the heart of London's Underground." http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,860011,00.html Last accessed on 22/2/2007.

Frow, John. Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity. Oxford: OUP, 1997.

---. "Bodies in Pieces." The Body in the Library. Ed. Leigh Dale and Simon Ryan. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1998. 35-55.

Ghosh, Amitav. The Calcutta Chromosome. London: Harper Perennial, 2001.

Gibson, Sarah. "Accommodating Strangers: British Hospitality and the Asylum Hotel Debate." Journal for Cultural Research 7:4 (2003): 367-386.

---. "The Hotel Business is About Strangers: Border Politics and Hospitable Spaces in Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things*." Third Text 20:6 (2006): 693-701.

Gilbert, Helen and Joanne Tompkins. Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics. London/New York: Routledge, 1996.

Gilbert, Helen. "Manjula Padmanabhan's Harvest: Global Technoscapes and the International Trade in Human Body Organs." Contemporary Theatre Review: An International Journal 16.1 (2006): 123-30.

Gilroy, Paul. Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000.

---. After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia. London: Routledge, 2004.

Goodwin, Michelle. Black Markets: The Supply and Demand of Body Parts. NewYork: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Graham, Elaine. "Cyborgs or Goddesses? Becoming Divine in a Cyberfeminist Age." Virtual Gender: Technology, Consumption and Identity. Ed. Alison Adam and Eileen Green. London/New York: Routledge, 2000. 302-23.

Halbert, Debora J. Resisting Intellectual Property. London/New York : Routledge, 2005.

Haraway, Donna. Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.

Harris, John and Charles A. Erin. "An Ethical Market in Human Organs." Journal of Medical Ethics 29:3 (2003): 137-8.

Harrison, Nicholas. "Who Needs an Idea of the Literary?" Paragraph July (2005): 1-17.

Harvey, David. The Condition of Postmodernity : An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1989.

Ishiguro, Kazuo. Never Let Me Go. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

Kaye, Ron. "Redefining the refugee: the UK media portrayal of asylum seekers." The New Migration in Europe: Social Constructions and Social Realities. Ed. Khalid Koser and Helma Lutz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 163-182.

Kubrick, Stanley. 2001: A Space Odyssey. Warner Brothers, 1968.

Kundnani, Arun. "In a Foreign Land: the New Popular Racism." Race and Class 43:2 (2001): 41-60.

Kushner, Tony. "Meaning Nothing but Good: Ethics, History and Asylum-Seeker Phobia in Britain." Patterns of Prejudice 37:3 (2003): 257-276.

Lazarus, Neil, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

---. "The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism." Postcolonial Studies and Beyond. Ed. Ania Loomba et al. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.

Lock, Margaret. Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Loomba, Ania et al, ed. Postcolonial Studies and Beyond. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.

Marx, Karl. Early Writings [of] Karl Marx. London: New Left Review, 1975.

---. Capital Volume One. London: Penguin, 1990.

---. Capital Volume Three. London: Penguin, 1990.

Mathur, Suchitra. "Caught between the Goddess and the Cyborg: Third-World Women and the Politics of Science in Three Works of Indian Science Fiction." Journal of Commonwealth Literature 39.3 (2004): 119-38.

Mbembe, Achille. On the Postcolony. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001.

McCracken, Scott. Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.

McDonald, Keith. “Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go as ‘Speculative Memoir’.” Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly 30.1 (2007): 74-83.

Mehan, Uppinder and Nalo Hopkinson, Ed. So Long been Dreaming : Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004.

Neilson, Brett. "Globalization and the Biopolitics of Aging." CR: The New Centennial Review 3.2 (2003): 161-86.

Padmanabhan, Manjula. Hot Death, Cold Soup. Cleveland: Garnett Publishing, 1997.

---. “Harvest.” Postcolonial Plays – an Anthology. Ed. Helen Gilbert. London/New York: Routledge, 2001. 217-50.

Pateman, Carole. The Sexual Contract. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.

Pesta, David. “Its easy: a few forms, a tired nod and you beat the asylum barrier.” Sunday Times. Nov 3: 2002.

Piercy, Marge. He, She and It. New York: Fawcett Books, 1993

Rabinow, Paul. Essays on the Anthropology of Reason. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

---. Making PCR: A Story of Biotechnology. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997.

Rabinow, Paul and Talia Dan-Cohen. A Machine to Make a Future: Biotech Chronicles. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.

Radin, Margaret Jane. "Market-Inalienability." Harvard Law Review (Cambridge) 100.8 (1987): 1849-1938.

Ramachandran, Ayesha. "New World, no World: Seeking Utopia in Padmanabhan's Harvest." Theatre Research International 30.2 (2005): 161-74.

Ricœur, Paul. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences : Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation. Ed. John B.Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Roberts, Adam. Science Fiction. London: Routledge, 2006.

Rose, Nikolas. The Politics of Life itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Sales, Rosemary. "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28:3 (2005): 445-462.

Scheper Hughes, Nancy. "Commodity Fetishism in Organs Trafficking." *Commodifying Bodies*. Ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Loïc Wacquant. London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002. 31-62.

---. "Parts Unknown: Undercover Ethnography of the Organs-Trafficking Underworld." Ethnography 5:1 (2004): 29-73.

Sharp, Lesley. "The Commodification of the Body and Its Parts." Annual Review of Anthropology 29 (2000): 287-328.

---. Strange Harvest: Organ Transplants, Denatured Bodies, and the Transformed Self. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. London: Longman, 2004.

Smith, Neil. "The Sum of all Frears." http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/reviews/2411751.stm Last accessed on 22/2/2007.

Spivak, Gayatri. The Spivak Reader. Ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean. London/New York: Routledge, 1996.

---. Death of a Discipline. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

Stableford, Brian. "Science Fiction before the Genre." The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 15-31.

Sunder Rajan, Kaushik. Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Suvin, Darko. Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1988.

Treneman, Ann. "Promises, promises – why I can't go home." Times 2. Nov 7: 2002.

Wald, Priscilla. "What's in a Cell? John Moore's Spleen and the Language of Bioslavery." New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation 36.2 (2005): 205-25.

Waldby, Cathy and Robert Mitchell. Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Young, Robert. "Ideologies of the Postcolonial." Interventions 1:1 (1998): 4-8.

---. Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.