



Across Text and Screen: Programming Subjectivity through Soft Power and Popular Culture in *Never Let Me Go* and Its Film Adaptation

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Abstract

Memory and the acts of return play a crucial role in identity formation. It reveals the ways individuals construct a sense of self within contemporary cultural discourse mediated by social, technological, and affective forces. The paper examines Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and its 2010 film adaptation directed by Mark Romanek as an extended intermedial engagement that explores conditions under which clones are denied complete autonomy. It exposes how soft power operates through regulation of emotional life. Moving beyond conventional readings, the paper contends that control is secured through affective engineering i.e., shaping of subconscious emotional attachments that bind subjects to oppressive institutional systems. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks of Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory, Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism, Michel Foucault's biopolitics, Stefan Herbrechter's critical posthumanism, along with Linda Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as an intermedial process, the paper reconceptualizes memory not as a stable repository of lived experiences but as a mediated structure embedded within technoscientific regimes, producing obedient posthuman subjects. Situated within popular culture, the paper contributes to intermedial studies while offering a critique of soft power. It demonstrates how film adaptation acts as an extension and intensifies these processes by normalizing systemic violence through intimate emotional structures.

Keywords: Adaptation, Critical Posthumanism, Cruel Optimism, Posthuman Subjectivity, Prosthetic Memory, Soft Power.

Introduction

In the contemporary techno-cultural systems, where life can be biologically manufactured and

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socially engineered, power increasingly operates not through physical coercion within the prison cells, but through restrained management of emotional and affective life. Memory and return have long been seen as stabilising forces of identity. They have now become mediated, regulated, and historically constituted processes that are influenced by social, technological, and institutional factors. Throughout the literary history from classical epics to ambivalent nostalgias of Romanticism, themes of memory and return have served as fundamental mechanisms for the negotiation of relationship between past and the self. In classical literature like Homer's *Odyssey*, the return was portrayed as a happy reunion with the place, memory, or an emotion. The social and technological upheavals of the 20th and 21st centuries have disrupted this restorative mode of return to a great extent.

Contemporary literature, including dystopian and speculative fiction, destabilises the return to the past and structures it as unstable and incomplete. In this metamorphosis, memory no longer provides continuity or coherence, but it represents a site of ideology production, characterised by an irreversible loss, a discontinuity, and the impossibility of stable return. So, meaning is not retrieved but created, by mediated complex systems of social and technological means.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and its 2010 film adaptation by the same name directed by Mark Romanek depict a dystopian world that dooms clones to a state of restricted autonomy in a controlled structure of nurturing, education, and ultimately, organ donation. Although the novel has been explored using conventional bioethical, dystopian, and posthumanist lenses, scholars in recent years have also started to turn away from focusing only on overt institutional brutality and violence to examine a "quiet dystopia, where domination is subtle, institutionalised, and emotionally normalized" (Khunjuju, 2005) which means the control is maintained not through the obvious violence or coercion, but as a series of subtle social acts and consent within particular institutional spaces. However, there remains a critical gap in understanding the intermedial relationship between novel and the film adaptation to see how it intensifies the meaning and how adaptation affects their affective and imaginative powers, like feelings and desires.

Drawing on this gap, the paper focuses on the production of subjectivity, which regulates emotional life. It challenges the idea of conventional reading by suggesting that power in *Never Let Me Go* (both novel and the film adaptation) is exercised by affective engineering, which works through the pre-conscious emotional attachments like memories and desires to make clones compliant. In this way, the novel and its adaptation functions not only as a mode of controlling biological life but also programming of subjectivity itself. Thus, the paper attempts to analyse both the novel and its film adaptation not as separate entities, but as an intermedial continuum that co-produces meaning as part of popular culture.

To explore how memory and affect can be considered complementary technologies of governance, the research draws on Alison Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory, Lauren Berlant's idea of cruel optimism, Michel Foucault's understanding of biopolitics, Stefan Herbrechter's critical posthumanism and Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as intermedial process. These interdisciplinary perspectives simultaneously broaden the understanding of soft power which emphasises how influence can be exercised through attracting others to want or adopt desired outcomes without using force or coercion (Nye, 2004). The concept of soft power was coined by Joseph Nye in the context of international relations, and since then it has been applied predominantly to examine the role of institutions in shaping the beliefs, values, and behaviour of the individuals by encouraging them to believe in particular norms and rules as

they are natural and desired. Thus, instead of relying on biopolitical compulsion, soft power in *Never Let Me Go* works by securing consent in order to engage in a system which restrict the autonomy and control the emotional lives of the clones.

The paper, therefore, contends that memory in *Never Let Me Go* becomes one of the biggest weapons to conform the subject's own disposability. This study also contributes to the ongoing debates on posthuman subjectivity. When the novel is read alongside the film adaptation, this instability becomes even more apparent, since these distinctions between original and copy, human and nonhuman, and subject and object are further blurred. Dr. Hatice Yurttas in his paper, "An Original Copy: The Film Adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" writes that "Ishiguro disrupts the boundary between the original and the copy, and unsettles the authenticity of the human by deliberately and successfully confusing it with the clone" (2016, p.191). Therefore, this intermedial perspective helps to understand how media and technology are involved in the production and transformation of subjectivity.

This study does not treat adaptation as a difference but places *Never Let Me Go* in the realm of popular culture, a space where both novel and film are mass mediated and serve to shape collective emotional experience. Affect is not just represented but is also reinforced and disseminated via intermedial exchange. This approach aligns with Stuart Hall's (1981) understanding of the popular culture as a site where power is constantly negotiated. From this perspective, culture does not merely reflect society; it constructs and is constructed by social and cultural forms. Emotional narratives, cultural artifacts, feelings, and memories that are mediated through communication do not just express ideology, but they shape conditions of emotion through which it is experienced and reinforced. Memory and affect are therefore not only places of recovery or resistance, but devices through which subjects are made to feel, remember, and comply. In that sense, popular culture does not just reflect the ideology, it also participates in the production of subjectivity and can be understood as one of the most important sites of affective governance through which human life is transformed into a programmable and commodified resource. The novel and its film adaptation highlight the fact that culture does not simply reflect a system of power, but also helps to produce it. Thus, *Never Let Me Go* (both the novel and the film adaptation) acts as a narrative of subjectivity where affective governance renders clones disposable and affectively aligned with the conditions of their own disposability.

Theoretical Framework

The paper builds on an interdisciplinary framework that combines affect theory, memory studies, biopolitics, critical posthumanism and adaptation studies to investigate programming of subjectivity in the novel *Never Let Me Go* and its cinematic adaptation. These approaches converge in a conceptual field, where memory and emotion can be viewed as complementary mechanisms of governance in a technoscientific milieu.

The relationship between affect and memory is central to this framework as technologies of governance. Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism portrays affective condition in which subjects are attached to their desires that sustain and restrict them. The emotions of love, hope, and the prospect of "deferral" serve as tools for maintaining participation of clones in the oppressive system they exist within. This affective structuring relates to Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory, i.e., the act of memory as a socially and culturally produced process, rather than only a personally generated or organic one. Thus, affect and memory consequently work in conjunction, generating individual moments of attachment that are always institutionally shaped. Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics also highlights that contemporary power is exercised over life itself. By caring, educating, and disciplining the lives of the inmates, Hailsham acts as a biopolitical institution. The paper argues that, control

in *Never Let Me Go* is not only about management of biological life, it also functions at the level of emotional experience that not only organises the way subjects experience their life but also how they interpret, justify, and emotionally accommodate their predetermined life. Thus, clones' willingness to embrace their fate is not merely a product of coercion, but the result of a carefully devised system which regulates their physical and emotional lives. The study also draws on Stefan Herbrechter's critical posthumanism, which deconstructs the conventional notions of autonomy, authenticity, and self-determination of humanism. The clones are located in a liminal place, revealing the instability of the category of human as such. They are technologically produced, institutionally regulated, and emotionally managed and thus point towards a subjectivity that is mediated and not stable. In this context clones are not failed entities but are paradigmatic "posthuman" figures, whose lives, identities, and agency are affected by technoscientific systems.

This study also takes into consideration the theory of adaptation by Linda Hutcheon to explain the connection between the novel and its film adaptation. It treats both as a unified part of aesthetic and affective system. The novel and the film adaptation are thus understood as "repetition without replication" and can be seen as part of a shared affective system rather than as original and copy. The adaptation is not just a replication of the novel it re-mediates and embellishes it visually and sensibly. Thus, the adaptation functions as a visual extension of affective governance, which translates the experience of narrative memory to life and enhances the affective configurations through which compliance is organised.

This research takes an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective to argue that the power in *Never Let Me Go* (both forms) is most effectively harnessed at the level of lived experience, through emotional attachment, and memory. The study also situates *Never Let Me Go* within the realm of popular culture, in which circulation of novel and film through mass mediated forms helps to shape the emotional experience of the people. This synthesis also addresses how both high and popular cultural forms are mobilised for the purpose of ideological regulation. Thus, the paper underscores that while the biopolitical control is exercised through institutional regulation, the "soft power" of popular culture acts as a very influential method of controlling the feelings and emotions of the individuals. It reshapes attitudes, emotions, and expectations, and encourages the clones in *Never Let Me Go* to perceive those kinds of regulation as desirable, inevitable, and legitimate.

Prosthetic Memory and the Gallery Experiment

Never Let Me Go explores the late 20th century England where human cloning is accepted and regulated within the institutions like Hailsham. The novel is told through the eyes of an observant narrator and one of the clones, Kathy H., reflecting Gabriele Griffin's argument that, "never let me go takes on the perspective of the clones, rather than of their creators, in its presentation of technoscience" (2009, p. 652) to depict the everyday reality of the clones. Kathy ponders her experiences as a carer while waiting for her inevitable fate of becoming a donor. She returns to Hailsham, an apparently ideal boarding school that is designed for producing the clones for a biological purpose, that is, to become donors for human organs. Through Kathy's retrospective narration, memory serves as a way of self-preservation and ideological reinforcement. The deliberate use of restrained narrative progression in the novel is reinforced into the film adaptation. The controlled and unnatural cinematographic effects, that is, the use

of desaturated colour palette and the absence of vibrant colours, dominated by faded beige, muted olive green and washed-out grey colours, in the film adaptation creates an “aesthetic cloak.” This aesthetic cloak shows that the existence of clones is shaped by the institutional restrictions that are imposed on them and by the diminished status assigned to their bodies within the social order. The muted colour tone used in the film also displays an invisible oppression, which depicts a society where exploitation is embedded within everyday routine. Thus, through this aesthetic approach the adaptation extends the novel’s critique of biopolitical control by highlighting that containment of the clones is maintained through the internalisation of the roles that are assigned to them by the institution.

Hailsham is not just an educational institution, but a place where memory and identity are deliberately manufactured in everyday spaces of the institution. Thus, the instability of belonging and identity remain under the control of such institutions. Memory, here, is not a fixed storage of lived experiences, instead it regulates how the experiences are felt and understood. This becomes evident through the “Gallery” episode, where the artistic programme of the school is presented as an opportunity for the students (clones) to produce creative pieces of art for Madame’s personal collection, serving a sort of biopolitical function which makes the clones compliant subjects of institutional control. Madame is an occasional visitor from the outside world, who visits Hailsham to take the best creative work of the students, as if it had some worth outside the school. Her coming across with the students exposes the limitations of the institution. As Kathy recollects that Madame moved past the children looking at them the way people look at “spiders.” All the students know Madame is here to take something special away and this signifies that the clones already know that their artwork has value prior to the institutionalised purpose. The presence of the Madame acts as a bridge between intimate expression of the clones and cold institutional evaluation. The artwork of the clones functions as an emotional imbuing with anticipation of institutional authority and an early version of which Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have described as the totalising logic of the “cultural industry,” where the appreciation of the mass media is programmed from above and is already supposed to guarantee ideological alignment. In this process, “discourse ‘contains’ its own subjects because it offers prefabricated positions from which the discursive object can be ‘observed’ and statements can be uttered about it” (Herbrechter, 2013, p. 38). The Gallery thus represents a discursive stance in which the clones’ artwork is not consumed as an opportunity for self-discovery or self-expression, but as a data point for an outside authority intended to secure public recognition of the humanity of the clones.

Ambiguity plays a pivotal role in the Gallery. It does not provide space for creativity as true expression of self. It creates a system of affect that has the ability to teach the clones to emotionally invest in their own evaluative mechanism. The real purpose behind this creative programme is later revealed to the clones by Miss Emily, when she tells them that the paintings are collected to “prove you had souls at all” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 229). This revelation exposes the primary logic of the Gallery experiment. The initial recognition of this purpose is recontextualised in a way that becomes a form of test and reshapes meaning over time through institutional framing of the memory. Thus, art has become an apparatus of transforming an expression of the individuality. The clones’ growth therefore forms part of what Alison Landsberg has theorised as prosthetic memory that is a personal experience is not organically owned but it is constructed by connections to an exterior source of aesthetic expectations that is internalised as personal history. The cultivation of an aesthetic attitude does not free the clones, rather the tastes and art investments are pre-conditioned by institutions like Hailsham to ensure the self-regulation of compliance, aligning with what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has pointed out in his study of cultural distinction; it is always a social operation which moulds existing power relationships. Thus, the clones’ sense of self is an experience created and

remembered as meaningful from outside and in turn it is internalised as their own history.

The clones have pre-written identities, emotional life, and the life path which highlights a posthuman condition where clones are not just biological substances but an effect of discourse, and design of affective institutional control. Memory acts as a form of soft power, shaping the emotions and subjectivities through pedagogical practices, social interactions and carefully controlled environment of the institution. In this way the Gallery creates art along with a script for feeling human and for interpreting the self. It shows that the students are made to value creativity and the institution constructs it as a proof of their value. This continuity can also be explained in light of Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism, which involves the attachment to desires that help to maintain the subjects' subordinated status. It seems to offer art and the possibility of recognition, but keeps them in the same system that is limiting them. Thus, in Hailsham, "humanity" of the clones is a resource used to preserve the moral balance of the system as their love for the creativity drives their emotional commitment further.

The clones perform this compliance because of the ongoing myth of deferral, which is always postponed and never achieved. Their hope does not threaten the system around them but is integrated into a process of linking the personal desire with the expectation from the outside. Hailsham appears to be a place that is non-coercive and cultivates creativity and care. This seemingly unfettered freedom is actually a subtle kind of control. In this context, Shameen Black in the article "Ishiguro's Inhuman Aesthetics" writes that, "the novel does appear to bolster the ideals of liberal humanist art and liberal human empathy" (2009, p. 790). Thus, it looks like a normal institution on the surface, but there is actually a regulatory logic behind the Hailsham's liberal humanist appearance, where subjectivity is engineered rather than freely allowed to grow itself. This resonates with recent research on the novel's use of "ambiguous care," a concept that exposes the role of late-capitalist techno cultures that purposely exploits intimacy to create a viable emotional space from structural violence (Fortin-Tournes, 2025). Clones, therefore, are not manipulated to do things, rather they are coaxed into wanting to be recognised to humanity.

Hailsham acts less as a place of creativity and more as an archive of emotions. It acts as a space where affective governance operates as an expression of soft power as it is directly involved in the production of compliant subjects by shaping the clones' understanding of themselves and their relationships with others in the society. Subjectivity therefore is not merely found in memory; it is created through soft power with emotional meaning being continuously created by institutional systems. Traditional biopolitics always operate through physically managing, measuring, and regulating biological bodies, but the Gallery does this through controlling affect (soft power). Thus, power is not about direct oppression, it is about the management of existence. Hailsham shows that biological existence and the social life are intricately linked and the bodies are not merely disciplined, instead the conditions of life are disciplined, in such a way that subjects (clones) internalise the terms of their own containment.

The clones later discovered that their confinement is meaningful, even desirable, since the affective world has been organised for them in advance. In posthumanist context this process undermines the conception of the autonomous individual human subject. As Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus observes, subjectivity is "always already ideological," it is shaped through "the diverse openings and closings of subjectivity by design, which, also, is coextensive with posthumanist conceit" (2012, p. 261). The clones therefore do not appear as debilitated humans, but as exemplary specimens of subjectivity that is the product of technological, institutional and affective adjustment. Their sense of self is not "natural" or

“self-made” but is the product of a system of biological production combined with emotional regulation (soft power).

The paper emphasises the interplay between the memory and the affect as a means of governance through the Gallery episode. The institutional evaluation is a sort of experience of validation, long before the clones come to understand what is being evaluated. The clones’ sense of self is developed in structures that define and limit them. The film adaptation extends this sense of containment as Carey Mulligan’s (Kathy H.) controlled gestures, her gaze, and her moments of hesitation illustrates the emotional restraint. The cinematic choice of using close-ups and muted colour palette creates a kind of visual architecture. It ensures that the confinement and physical subjection of the clones is conveyed clearly to the audiences, even if it remains unspoken by the characters. These cinematic elements reveal the visible trap through which the clones are transformed into docile subjects. In this way subjectivity is neither suppressed nor erased but carefully constructed through pre-constructed systems of recognition. Soft power thus, operates through these systems shaping the boundaries of subjectivity before its full emergence.

Cruel Optimism and the Deferral Rumour

The circulation of shared beliefs among the clones seems to be one of the most subtle and powerful forms of control in *Never Let Me Go*. The rumour of “deferral” that is the belief that organ donation can be postponed if the clones find their true love, illustrates that hope functions as a means of regulating expectations. The deferral rumour was something that had been floating around for years amongst the clones and it provides a sense of agency in an oppressive system. It is a myth that was ubiquitous among clones to give them the illusion that they had some freedom of choice and their lives are not predetermined entirely. The deferral rumour has placed the clones in a posthuman state where there is no absence of agency, it rather pre-structures agency. It is a hope that never becomes a reality, instead it offers the possibility of postponement through the language of romantic love.

The concept of deferral is cast in the self-contained world of Hailsham that guarantees their “completion.” It remodels Kathy and Tommy’s emotional and temporal perception of the future. Their love affair takes on greater meaning, that is, if their love is proved to be real then they could apply for the donations to be put back for sometimes and perhaps they “could have a few years together” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 134). This makes intimacy a way of appraisal and an emotional valuation is presumed to validate within an existing system instead of questioning the legitimacy of the continued life. Eventually when they go to see Madame and Miss Emily to ask for recognition, they do not want to destroy the system in which they live. They just want to show that they are “properly in love” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 134) in order to escape the inevitability of the system for a while. Their appeal for deferral shows that subjectivity has been already constructed and internalised to function as per institutional approval rather than opposition. It shows that the role of the rumour was never to be believed literally, but emotionally experienced. This desperate petition represents the very defining paradox of the posthuman subjectivities, it offers a “speculation on the will to subjecthood” (Callus and Herbrechter, 2012, p. 253), which is constantly to be negated and contained by the very architectures of the cybernetic institutions that are responsible for their design. In this regard their agency is already determined and pre-established by institutionalised field that sets what counts as agency, and thus is constrained in advance.

The deferral is a phantom object of desire, a mode of organising emotional life that persistently does not become reality. This affective apparatus is the key device of the

biopolitical regime to disguise its violent character. In this regard, Tabir Amjad and Quratulaen Liaqat in the article, “Clones as Scapegoats: Slow Violence in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005)” published in 2026 notes that the wider human society thinks of the clones as expendable resources for achieving its own selfish and envious aspirations of living for a long time. The system keeps the clones like Kathy and Tommy so much hooked on the illusion of deferral that they cannot rebel, so that they can be the perfect non-conflictual scapegoats necessary to preserve the social order.

The hope of Kathy and Tommy will not interrupt the logic of exploitation, but it adds to their emotional involvement. Instead of resisting, their love becomes the means of compliance. The stronger their sense of deferral, the more entrenched they remain in the future. This proves that deferral rumour is not based on misinformation. It functions as a structure for yearning, demonstrating that soft power operates through internalisation of the institutional expectations. The promise of deferral encourages the clones to invest their energy in finding true love. It diverts their concentration away from the actual political conditions that make them compliant. The ideology of the clones that finding true “love” can save them from the donations for some time is the ultimate humanist illusion which is used by the system to sustain compliance by encouraging the clones to seek recognition within the very order that governs their lives. Until its eventual revelation as a myth, it has already served its purpose to keep them compliant. Foucault’s notion of biopolitics illuminates that the deferral does not mean rejection of the clones’ status of being donors. The clones are not cut off from power, but are part of it, which regulates forms of life whose emotional worlds are carefully controlled. Certainly, in Giorgio Agamben’s terms, the clones represent the “bare life,” where they are biologically sustained without political and ethical acknowledgment and the deferral myth supplements this state.

The novel portrays the revelation of the myth through Kathy’s narration whereas the film projects this moment through cinematic enhancements in the sound and the rhythm. The quiet narrative atmosphere is reshaped in the adaptation through the use of controlled sound effects and colour tones to create an atmosphere of melancholy that reflects the subdued acceptance of circumstances by the clones. It depicts the psychological and emotional consequences experienced by the clones when they realise the deferral is a myth. The deferral rumour has a kind of power that is not prohibitive. It has created relationships, attachments, and a way of being that has fallen in line with the clones’ own disposability. Hope, desire and love turned into tools of governance. Thus, futurity is not horizon but a “curated temporal structure” which is, emotionally inhabited, and structurally foreclosed. In this sense, the paper reveals that love is not alien to mechanisms of control, it is rather essential for their operation. Within this form of love, there is no resistance, it keeps governance alive. This indicates that deferral does not just consist of a false belief, but a structured affective apparatus where desire, biopolitics, and emotional attachment come together and makes the system stable. Hope is thus the mechanism by which disposability is made liveable. In this way, the deferral rumour exemplifies the use of soft power to manage longing. The clones do not just lack freedom; they are so conscientiously manufactured to experience the appearance of meaningful freedom. The rumour does not challenge the biopolitical logic that governs their existence, rather it reinforces it by making structural violence an emotionally uninhabitable horizon and sustaining clones’ attachment to life through the illusion that their fate can still be postponement. The film visualises this controlled emotional environment through the scene where Tommy and Kathy learn that deferrals do not exist in reality. It renders the frailty of hope that has sustained them. After receiving the news that deferral is a myth, Tommy drives through the countryside, he leaves the car abruptly and screams into open landscape. The absence of background music in

this moment heightens the emotional impact of the scene and draws the audiences' attention towards Tommy's hopelessness as he recognises that the possibility of escape was merely an illusion. Romanek portrays the contrasts between Tommy's cries and Kathy's silence by manipulating sound effects to emphasise the internalised grief explored in the novel through cinematic expressions. Thus, this reveals that the hope functions as a form of soft power that is shaped by the system to encourage the emotional attachment and sustain personal aspirations, while simultaneously denying the extent to which individuals control over their feelings.

The Cassette Tape and the Intimacy of Mediation

In *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy falls in love with Judy Bridgewater's tape, *Songs After Dark*, particularly, "song: track number three, 'Never Let Me Go'" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 63). It is one of the most emotional experiences of her life. The cassette groove was an absolute obsession for students at Hailsham. For Kathy, it was not just any tape that she "used to listen properly" rather she recollects that she:

Just waited for that bit that went: 'Baby, baby, never let me go...' And what I'd imagine was a woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life. 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, never let me go... (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 64)

Thus, Kathy's most intimate feelings of motherhood, attachment, care and loss are shown to be mediated in the form of a mass-produced cultural object (song). In this context, emotional life is presented as a collage of projections and repetitions. Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory therefore align here as the tape functions as an artifact of popular culture, creating sensations that are perceived as personal past.

Kathy has learnt feelings about the song from the lyrics, tone and rhythm of the song. The music serves as a blueprint for the experience she seeks to understand and articulate the feelings of attachment, care, and loss in a kind of kindness that is absent from her sterile childhood. The imagined embrace of the child is not a memory in traditional sense, but it bears the mark of cultural production, resonating with Alison Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory, where memory is actively produced through the cassette, and Kathy internalises this sense of emotion.

The tape shows the way in which clones are taught to inhabit emotional identities prior to acquiring the experiences usually attributed to them. Kathy's dream of motherhood is neither a memory nor a fantasy but rather a part of cultural circulation, and an indication of affective subjectivity. The 'outside world' is mediated through one of her "precious things," which is the tape. In this context, Stefan Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (1995) claim that, "posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image" (p. 3), which in the words of Stefan Herbrechter "makes visible the connections between power and desire, virtuality and reality, sexuality and its consequences" (2013, p. 98). The cassette therefore is not just a hobby, but a technological prosthesis that enables Kathy to think herself as a human, an identity that system denies her. The tape is not a natural memory, it is transmitted, absorbed, and lived as if it was a personal memory, creating a posthuman condition, where emotional life cannot be separated from technological and cultural prostheses. The importance of this attachment becomes evident when the tape is lost, leaving Kathy with a thumping great hole in her life, and its rediscovery again in the Norfolk. The rediscovery of the tape in Norfolk marks a moment of recovery, but it reactivates through the same mediated structure that give rise to the attachment itself.

The attachment provides comfort along with maintaining a future that cannot be realised, which is the promise embedded within the song, “Never Let Me Go.” The tape exposes the extent, to which Kathy’s identity has always been constituted through external objects of popular culture, and thus this apparent coherence aligns with Lauren Berlant’s cruel optimism, the attachment offers comfort while sustaining a future that cannot be realised within Kathy’s social reality as a clone destined for completion. Her affective engagement with the tape gives her comfort but also maintains an affective horizon structurally foreclosed by the biopolitical regime. As Lyotard (1991), quoted in Stefan Herbrechter (2013) says, the “inhumanity of the ‘system’” can often use “humanism as its ideology” (p. 8), in this case, need for mother’s love is the most prominent human emotion, that serves as the ideological mechanism for pinning Kathy into her institutional role. This can be further understood via the argument of Fredric Jameson (1991), that is postmodern consumer culture replaces lived experience with the mediated nostalgia. Thus, for Kathy, the presence of the cassette is symptomatic of a world where affect and circulation are not distinct but connected. Her private emotional world is already structured by the logic of reproducible cultural forms where the authenticity is simulated in the repetition. The significance of the cassette is not that it captures an authentic past, but it can create a future which it constantly repeats and which is unreachable.

The film’s use of subdued colours, diffused light, close up shots, and an almost mute music further intensify the scene of Kathy’s (Cary Mulligan) finding the tape in soft, nostalgic tones. Mark Romanek uses all this as an aesthetic cloak to facilitate viewers to empathise with Kathy’s emotional experience, as if it were immediate and true. Thus, the film can be seen as a visual and auditory extension of the novel’s exploration of memory, enhanced through the affectual force of cinematic immediacy. As the adaptation is set through the medium of film, it becomes a proof of Kathy’s prosthetic grief, showing that subjectivity is already mediated and constructed. The adaptation is not about changing the novel’s exploration of memory but its affective power by means of the audiovisual immediacy. Memory and intimacy are not pure expressions of selfhood they are constantly influenced by cultural and technological forms, including novel and its film adaptation. Kathy, therefore, experiences intimacy, loss and belonging through an external object (song) that becomes deeply personal and core part of her life.

At the end, Kathy envisions herself standing in front of an empty Norfolk field surrounded by a fence and a couple of rows of “barbed wire” and bits of rubbish and plastic blowing out by wind. Throughout *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy’s recollections strive for coherence, meaning, and remembrance. As the bits of trash clings to the fence, Kathy’s memories hang on like traces that do not fade, drift away, or restore what has been lost. Thus, the use of colours and sound effects in the adaptation enhances the scene by showing that the field is not a place of return but rather a place of imagined memory, loss and absence. Thus, remembering no longer acts as a promise of resolution but a mode of persistence in a system which remains unaltered. Kathy’s horizons of expectation, formerly held in place by the attachments that propped up her love, hope and imagination of a different life, are lost and what is left is melancholia, as Stefan Herbrechter observes, “pure postmodern (or posthumanist) melancholia, after the end of the modern and humanistic principle of hope” (2013, pp. 6-7). This melancholia is presented affectively by Kathy’s stillness before the field, where hope has been displaced, but consciousness still remains.

The objects in the wire reflect Kathy’s memories that are lost, fractured and impossible to recover. Kathy neither forgets her past nor does she let it go. The desire to return does not

take the subject back to its place of origin, but forces her to look at the lack of a fixed point of return. By holding these fragments, she engages in ethical witnessing as a way to embrace onto what the system has deemed disposable lives. This aligns with Stefan Herbrechter's notion that within the "complex system, humans are merely a means to an end" (2013, p. 9). Kathy's subjectivity is not recovered rather is inscribed in structures that have produced it.

This affective stillness is accentuated in the film adaptation by the visual minimalism. Mark Romanek frames Carey Mulligan (Kathy) against a bleakly muted backdrop of barbed wire. Although the film does not portray institutional violence, its presence is felt through the lack of it, and the landscape carries its weight. The absence of dramatic movement, quick cuts, or an overtly emotional soundtrack adds to this sense of suspension, which takes the place of any closure. Such aesthetic restraint aligns with Stefan Herbrechter's assertion that, "the posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image" (2013, p. 98). The film's last scene focuses even more on Kathy's body as the place where audiences experience loss, which the institution leaves mostly in the background. Finally, through the last scene Kazuo Ishiguro and Mark Romanek add memory and effect to their conceptual end. They do not reverse power or provide an escape from power. They maintain a precarious escape from it. More than offering a revolutionary resistance, *Never Let Me Go* ends with a quiet stabilisation of a subjectivity that has become posthuman, and in which memory is not a means of liberation but a fragile ethical practice of endurance, the traumas of which are held in a mode of preservation, yet under conditions that remain fundamentally unchanged.

Conclusion

The analysis contends that reading the novel *Never Let Me Go* alongside its film adaptation establishes an intermedial continuum in which different aesthetic strategies reveal the production of posthuman subjectivity through affective governance. Analysing both the media highlights how soft power operates in a techno cultural society not through suppression of "human" but by careful calibration of its affect, memory, attachment and care encouraging the institutional values to become internalised. Building on this interdisciplinary approach, the paper demonstrates that adaptation is not just a medium-shift but a strategic intensification of sensory and emotional regulation. This process is heightened in film version through Romanek's use of visual minimalism, restrained performances, silence, and atmosphere, which function as an "aesthetic cloak" that normalises systemic violence through shared sensory experience. By bringing adaptation studies, posthumanism, and affect theory together, this study reveals how literary and cinematic texts illuminate the formation of posthuman subjectivities that exists through a fragile, prosthetic trace shaped by biopolitical governance. Thus, in an era of rapid technological alterations and shifting biological boundaries, these narratives expose how systems determine whose lives are valued and how individuals come to understand themselves within these institutional systems. Ultimately, the study concludes that novel and film together reveal how different media represent the production of posthuman identity through emotional mechanisms of soft power. Therefore, by translating narrative into visual and sensory experience, the adaptation demonstrates the cultural work of mediation within biopolitical systems where power achieves its ultimate efficacy not when imposed externally, but when institutional control is experienced as intimacy, attachment and care. In this way, contemporary governance operates best through programming of emotional life to make systems of control appear natural and inevitable.

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