

Identifying bodies: emergences of representation in “The Chance”

When Peter Carey wrote the short story “The Chance”, in 1979, the world polarization between “right” and “left” ideologies was ruining. Great utopias, as the Marxism, were already losing strength. In the same year, Michel Foucault published “Microfísica do Poder”, showing that nothing in the bourgeois capitalist society is more material, more bodily, than power, for power is not only repressive, on the contrary, it produces knowledge about the body (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 147). In what other way than bodily control would the Earth settlers aliens in “The Chance”, the *Fastalogians*, exercise power over humans since for them, the human race was “nothing but cattle” and “their sole function was to provide inter-galactic balance of payments” (CAREY, 1993, p. 57)? My focus is on the very argument of Carey’s short story: the Genetic Lottery. “The Chance” brings to the reader a new sort of possibility in terms of genetic manipulation, a Chance. Nonetheless, what would be the implications the entire change of body in personal identity? And what are the evidences that appear in the characters’ course of existence as manifestation of their processes of identity that can serve as guides for an analysis based on theories of Postmodern philosophers and writers so that it is possible to define both identity and the body as places occupied by Subjects? Is it only the exclusion of the Other, suggested by Stuart Hall (HALL, 2005), that moves the process of identity and gives it direction?

Although at the beginning of the story Paul, seems to be merged to the environment and to be like most people, he begins to appear along the story undoubtedly by the exclusion of the Other. However, those processes of exclusion are engendered by the image he constructs of his body. By means of his narration and speech, Paul classifies the Others as different from him, as well as himself as distinctive, and that is why the reader sees him sometimes in situations when it seems to be a collision point to come and. Although such a point never comes into effect, the imminence or proximity of this collision (and sometimes even the overtaking of it) marks the construction of each character’s identity. The imminence takes place in Paul’s situation with Carla, the things he wants badly to occur, his hard attempts to cancel her Chance, his efforts to get closer to her but he is never able to; Carla seems to be unreachable after some point. The proximity and overtaking happen when Paul gets very close, spatially speaking, to the hook-nosed lady but when the collision is at the point to be concretized, it is overtaken by Paul’s close vision of the lady and his consequent

withdrawal. These two Others force Paul to accept that the collision is impossible, because he cannot effectively touch the Others as it would be necessary to collide with them.

Individual movements: what the story is about

Three years after people on Earth have been introduced to the Genetic Lottery, the story begins. The Chance was presented by the aliens named *Fastalogians* or *Fastas*. The name “Chance”, is not arbitrarily assigned, say, not by chance, but due to the fact that it gives anyone an opportunity (a chance) to have a complete change on his/her body. Right after you get a Chance, possibilities are that you will not recognize yourself in the mirror. The procedure is unknown, as well as the home planet of the *Fastas*, but the lack of knowledge and curiosity about how any sort of technology works has become automatic by the time the story starts, as asserted by Paul in the beginning: “We were used not to understanding. It had become a habit with the Americans who had left us with a technology we could neither control nor understand” (CAREY, 1993, p. 56)

Paul has lost in the Lottery, that is all he says. On a Tuesday afternoon he meets Carla on his way back home. She is sitting on a footpath asking for money with a dead body by her side¹. So they get to know each other and Carla lets Paul know she is going to take a Chance; which is no problem for him at the beginning. However, after they fall in love, Carla’s longing for a Chance starts to bother Paul, his obsession is manifested as a series of endless efforts to prevent her from doing that. After some time, Paul moves to Carla’s place, but not for long. This is only until their conflict arises. Carla is taking a Chance in order to fit in a group (the *Hups*) of people who believe that a revolution demands a people’s body.

This obsession about Carla’s Chance, therefore, leads Paul to elaborate a powerful plan to prevent her from undergoing the change of body: a good trap to keep her a prisoner for one single day, the day before her Chance. He must be smart enough to prepare an “enticing, or at least neutral” trap (id., p. 83), just like the Alien technology: a trap that attracts for its simplicity. He builds an orange door, like the rest of their place, so he could blame the landlord for the color. It is perfect and cannot fail; Carla is going to miss her Chance. However, Carla had misinformed him about the day of her Chance, so he goes after her to the Chance Centre. But the place is crowded, busy, stinking, a complete mess, and Carla can be

¹ According to the narrator, a common practice was to ask money on the street with a corpse by side, usually someone of the family. The money would be gathered for the funeral. In this case, Carla would say that the corpse was her grandfather; however, as explained after in the story, it was the body of a stranger.

anywhere. Paul goes back home and nothing happens for some time. In the night, Carla comes back; she has been transformed in a fat woman with a coarsened face, grey hair, fingers and arms full of creases. She stays all night long sitting in a chair near Paul's bed, but he decides not to open his eyes: "[b]ut in the deep grey selfish folds of my mean little brain I decided that I had not woken up, that I would not wake up. I groaned, feigning sleep and turned over" (id., p. 86). After the Revolution, Carla has never reappeared, probably she has died during it, for she apparently has been "one of the fiercest fighters, who attacked and killed without mercy, who slaughtered with rage that was exceptional even in such a bloody time" (id., p. 88).

Processes of identification: Paul

The *Hups* meetings are not mere encounters among the characters, hence may here be understood how those meetings involve interaction and participate in the construction of personal identity for the characters. To interact with someone demands the recognition of the Other and, in most cases, the sustenance of a dialogue, either with words, movements, or both. Based on the theories presented by Stuart Hall, namely, that the process of identity is started by the exclusion of the Other (HALL, 2005, 1997), may now be presented Paul in contrast, dialogue and interaction to other characters: Carla, the hook-nosed lady and the dwarf.

When Paul meets Carla for the first time, he promptly makes the distinction between himself and the Other. The girl beside a corpse, asking for money of strangers, has her features pondered one by one by Paul, her "dark hair cut quite short and rather badly", her full eyebrows, her mouth wider regular and her large hands (CAREY, 1993, p. 58-59). She has feminine features and masculine behavior, she is strong and vulnerable all at once, she likes to be talked about, with the exception of the subject of her beauty. Paul not only looks at the Other and points out the differences, but is also attracted by these differences. Moreover, this happens in a way he cannot resist, if he bothered to. Therefore, the exclusion of the Other works here, besides as a constructor of identity, not as a factor of rejection, but of attraction.

Michel Maffesoli (2004) asserts that evil(ness) must be integrated, in order to participate of good(ness). This assertion entertains the whole concept of duplicity, he claims that good does not exist without evil; what may be read as an obvious observation is not so obvious, since nothing can be claimed to be obvious, philosophically speaking. Maffesoli claims that evil is inherent to the Earth and to Man, for, as he argues, "evil is summarized as following: to taste the fruits of the ground"(id., p. 80). To assume evil as part of the human,

comes from the assumption of duplicity, stating that if salvation comes from the sin, completion comes from the lack, the “one” comes from the “double”. This is not taken as a dichotomy, but as an act – or rather: **the** act – of completing something, namely, “Me” is completed by the Other. In the Postmodern mutation, according do Maffesoli, what suits is to give value to the evil, the Devil’s part, and make good use of it, aggregate it. One can make **distinction** from the Other but cannot be **apart** from this Other, because both are the same, “one” does not exist alone, but has to see the Other and integrate him. What Paul sees in Carla is what he lacks in himself, this duplicity, registered by the look he puts on her, this departure, is pursued by him in her as a way out of himself. This situation is nothing more than a possibility of identification enjoyed by Paul.

The next situation to be pointed out is found in the fourth chapter of the story, when Paul describes the first meeting at night. This episode has one of the greatest pictures of contrast in the story, for among a dwarf, a hook-nosed lady and a pock-marks-faced boy or man stands the “most beautiful Carla” (CAREY, 1993, p. 71), enthusiastic about that important event at her house; to Paul, she seems not to be aware of her beauty. In such a contrast it is important to observe the processes of identification within – Me and the Other, within a range of limits – and identification outside – the Others without Me –, the process of excluding without separating, of recognizing oneself and its limitations, mainly facing one’s own impotence concerning an external change. For instance, Paul cannot make any difference in Carla’s course of life, except from being part of it. Despite him, she meets her *Hup* partners, she holds firm onto her objective of changing her body, and finally takes her Chance.

When Paul enters home, he sees these group formed by people who have taken (perhaps many) Chances, and are the living results of the playing with life, a practice he accuses Carla of doing when she determinedly asserts she is going to take a Chance: “you’re too young to know anything. You’re a fool. You’re playing with life [...] Playing with it.” (id., p. 69), says Paul throwing books at her, right after their argument about the posters². Paul is consumed by rage when he finds out his expectation of putting off Carla’s Chance indefinitely was a mere illusion. Paul’s assumption was first to postpone his girlfriend’s entry into the Genetic Lottery so that, maybe, she would finally agree that it was senseless, perhaps quit taking it, but he seems to think that she may simply forget her Chance, because he

² Paul puts away Carla’s posters because for him there is no functionality in them after the event they announce has passed. Carla gets angry with him and they have a big fight for that reason.

himself has failures in his memory and does not care about memory preservation. However, his lack of memory is a consequence of his previous Chances, not a natural or inborn condition, Carla will not forget that, she takes care of her memory and her life's main objective – the Revolution – is only conceivable through the Chance. Paul's impotence in face of reality, in face of the unreachable and unchangeable decision of the Other, is transformed into rage and violence, against the impossibility of changing reality by his own will he reacts aggressively. The *Hups* meetings are opportunities for Paul to exercise the exclusion of the Other in relation to himself.

This is the first of the two times when Paul meets the dwarf, a remarkable secondary character in his narration, a man who was once handsome, on his own view, and has now his human figure transformed and representing deformity. To be a dwarf may neither be reason for pride nor humiliation, but here it serves to this character's purpose, which is that of identification with the group to which he belongs, therefore making him proud – he has achieved his own expectation as well as his group's short term ones. When the dwarf shows one old picture of him and says he was handsome, Paul addresses the reader, it is a joke, although its meaning is not clear for him, it becomes clear not exactly as a joke but as an irony in the next line, when Paul continues “[t]he photograph was creased with lines like the palm of an old man's hand” (id., p. 71). As the man on it, it also has been deformed, it also has been modified, it also has been changed for particular reasons, being faithful still to its owner's existence. This specific object, this picture, contains the dwarf's whole essence, from his previous visual image, through the transformations it has suffered, until its function of memory; the picture has for the dwarf the same importance Carla finds in her posters: memory, conservation, preservation.

The second meeting of *Hups* at Carla's place is far more involving for Paul and a considerably more traumatic one. This is when Paul meets, for the second time, the hook-nosed lady, who is then “arranged in tight brown rags and draped across a chair, her bowed legs dangling [...] revealing an uneven line of stained and broken teeth”(id., p. 74). After the lady's shoe falls off one of her feet, “revealing her mutant toes in all their glory”, she makes an effort to make conversation with Paul and this is when it is possible to observe how a Chance affects communication through language. The lady cannot speak continuous sentences, she leaves empty spaces, periods of silence and breaks followed by repetitions of words throughout her speech, as can be observed when she tries to make conversation to Paul:

“Come and sit. We can talk.”

“About what?” [...]

“About life,” she waved her hand airily, taking in the room as if it were the entire solar system. “About...love. What...ever.” Her speech had that curious unsure quality common in those who had taken too many Chances, the words spluttered and trickled from her mouth like water from a kinked and tangled garden hose. “You can’t go until your mince...mince has thawed.” [...] (id., p. 75)

As the Other for Paul, the hook-nosed lady seems to be harmless in the beginning of their interaction, Paul even ignores her. However, such harmlessness disappears and turns out into a threat when Paul realizes how close she is to him. Paul was busy finding excuses not to look to the lady, but when he runs out of things to do and looks at her, he has his first surprise: she is closer to him than he thought. Paul is not so lucid anymore, due to the mushrooms he has eaten, so as they find each other too close and the lady keeps on talking to Paul, a very confusing situation is developed. Both of them have to deal with the Other in different ways: the lady tries to approach and Paul tries to withdraw. However, after she gets so close that she touches him, he wants to move away. And what happens when the Other gets too close in this situation? Here Paul avoids her not because of their difference, but because of their similarity: he sees himself on her, the overstepping number of Chances, one over another. She shows what happened to her after so many changes of body, how that has affected her and in what levels. Paul gets apprehensive because he has never seen himself in that way; he needed this lady to make his “nature” visible to him. The lady helps him to see himself.

Above I said that there is no collision, what means that, consequently, there is no exactitude. Baudrillard (1991) says that the closer we get to the *simulacra*, the more evidently everything escapes from its own double. When the lady gets close to Paul, she gets closer enough to show him that even though they are extremely alike, against Paul’s will, they are not the double of each other. Baudrillard says that there is never similarity, metaphor, however, there is proximity, metonymy. This is what the lady proves to Paul, with what, explicitly or unconsciously, he is forced to agree.

The second surprise happens after the incomplete sexual intercourse between Paul and the hook-nosed lady. That is when, after being rejected, she reveals her real name to Paul: Jane Larange. He gets astonished when he remembers who Jane Larange is: a once beautiful and famous actress. This hook-nosed bow-legged mutant-toed lady keeps on being the woman she once was, simply because the beautiful woman does not exist. In the present, that is what matters, the hook-nosed lady is the beautiful actress as soon as the latter ceases to exist, and

that is what probably may happen to Carla after her Chance. The beautiful actress exists on Paul's imaginary, and probably on the imaginary of everyone who saw her once, but effectively, on Paul's view, there is no beauty on the body in front of him. Although the past belongs to the imaginary – therefore it is possible to say that it exists somehow –, what is important here is the present, for there is no way to participate of past events.

At the moment they get very close, Paul suddenly withdraws from the lady, “I wrenched her hand from my shoulder and she shrieked with pain. I pulled her leg from my waist and she fell back on to the floor, grunting as the wind was knocked from her.” (CAREY, 1993, p. 77) The proximity of collision here triggers the inverse movement, the lady's “face so foul, so misshapen, broken, the skin marked with ruptured capillaries, the green eyes wide, askance, alight with premature triumph” (id. *ibid.*) then appears.

If Carla is the Other that attracts Paul, if the hook-nosed lady is the Other that disgusts him, the dwarf is not, at any moment, effectively a threatening Other; the dwarf is harmless, and yet Paul gets angry with him. There is a remarkable moment in the story when the protagonist meets the dwarf. This moment is when Paul is working on the plans for the door he aims to construct in order to lock Carla for the day before her Chance. Paul gets angry with the dwarf because he seems to be threatening, but in fact he is not. First the dwarf demonstrates knowledge about the objective of the door: “with a door like that you could lock someone up in fine style, eh?” (id., p. 83), that, for Paul, is extremely invasive knowledge, for his plan concerning the door is a secret and should be protected. Although the dwarf does not explicitly say that he knows the function of the plan he discovers (and the function of the door), he shows Paul that he knows about traps and jails, about how to attract an enemy to a good trap. Right away, the dwarf reveals knowledge about Paul's problem with Carla, and that this problem is not worthy of anger, says he: “there are bigger problems you could address your anger to. Your situation now is that you are wasting energy being angry at the wrong things” (id., *ibid.*). The dwarf, Carla, the painter who was painting their place orange, all of those people compose the “wrong things”, the Revolution constitutes the right thing to worry about. This situation shows how the Other bothers, threatens, invades, judges, even without intention to proceed that way. The proof is that when the dwarf comes around, Paul stops his occupation, folds his plans, starts to answer the dwarf's statements with “go and fuck yourself”(id., *ibid.*) and only when this Other goes away, Paul returns to his plans again. Between the dwarf's arriving and leaving, Paul is obliged to disguise his concentration in his own plans and to go away to the pier to do something else, so the dwarf would leave and Paul

could go back to the construction of his door, which is well defined as the “monument to my duplicity and fear” (id., p. 84)

These processes of identification and identity described above are given through and by the body because the relations with the Others are given through and by the body and bodily parts. The Subject needs to notice and compare (himself to) the Other through his own body. Paul sees Carla’s beauty – what lacks in himself -, the hook-nosed lady’s strength and deformities – what exists in himself and overflows in the lady –, the perceptiveness of the dwarf – something he cannot deal with. This way, Paul dreams, not romantically but imaginatively speaking, of being himself, whilst occupying a different body, different from the one he has been born with. Paul wonders, perhaps unconsciously, who or what he is and is not, who or what must be excluded for him to remain himself. In other times, the ageing street fighter (Paul’s current body), may have been the Other, the excluded, and now Paul has to incorporate this body, to accept it as his own and as himself. This is the dream of absurdity of which Jean Baudrillard speaks, when we fight for our identity, find our label of existence and try to prove what is evident (BAUDRILLARD, 1997, p. 64).

These inferences presume that the individual who takes a Chance carries at least a basic or minimal idea concerning his/her body – he is **aware** of it, that he considers his/her body as an instrument useful to make considerably important, or crucial, events take place. Now I shall present the bodies in the story and their places in it.

The place of the body

To conceive of the human body has become a matter of what/where the limits of humanity stand and how far its mutability goes. It is possible to watch the body be transformed by brand-new technologies and to re-write it by the use of totally different moulds after the dawn of a new anthropomorphism in which the term “human”, and its infinite directions, lies between natural and artificial embracing both. The attitude of treating “natural” as a synonym for “organic” as a closed issue or already answered (never-made) question has become obsolete since living beings have been mixed with artificial products (foods, medicines, transportation vehicles, computer tools and utilities, etc) in order to increase life conditions and maintain life, mainly after World War II. Donna Haraway’s cyborg myth is the unquestionable representation of the human-machine and organism-

technology inseparable interaction and the dissolution of the distinction between natural and artificial (HARAWAY, 1991).

If the technologies such as the ones described by Donna Haraway (1991), Katherine Hayles (1999) and Best and Kellner (2001), for example, are summarily extensions of human brain, body and unconscious, as claimed by Lucia Santaella (2004, p. 245), then we can affirm the body straightaway as the site for experience/experiment/sensation, and take the sense organs as interfaces for entry and way out of data. Santaella draws a comprehensive map of the multiple realities of the Post-human body (Id., p. 200): the remodeled body – for externally changed organic tissue; the prosthetic body – for artificial constructions based on organic parts and functions; the exploited body – for medicinal purposes; the plugged body – for cyberspace. This last one is subdivided according to the interfaces it entertains: immersion by connection, immersion through avatars, hybrid immersion, telepresence, virtual environments. There is still the simulated body – for graphic representation and numerical imaginary; the digitalized body – for detailed three-dimensional representation; and the molecular body – for genetic manipulation.

It is possible to follow along the story several distinct types of body and watch the diversity of its cast of characters. Each one of the types indicates a distinct group of individuals and represents a different kind of universal character, as we shall see in the following paragraphs, which should serve the purpose of mapping the several places the body occupies in the story.

The second paragraph in the story points out the *Leapers* – the suicidal bodies –, throwing themselves from roofs of buildings and gilders of bridges. To join the *Leapers*, considers Paul, is beyond the *Fastalogians'* alternative. However, would it not be the other way around? The Genetic Lottery beyond the suicide option? For in case of one does not have enough courage to kill him/herself, at least it is possible to change his/her body, to pretend to be another. Notwithstanding, this question is not discussed in the story, it means, Paul does not consider the reverse of his opinion. Many are the reasons that can lead to suicide as a last resort; however, the most frequent one is the intolerability of whatever the situation is. About the *Leapers*, the narrator does not say much, only a brief paragraph to compare them to “over-ripe fruit” falling from “the rotten trees of a forgotten orchard”(CAREY, 1993, p. 55).

There are the alien bodies – the *Fastalogians* – the picture of mess, with their childish attitude and inoffensive look when not confronted, wearing clothes badly and ill-fitting. The

Fastalogians' disorganized external appearance works as a camouflage: "In appearance they were so less threatening than the Americans" (id., p. 56), otherwise an approximation would make itself impracticable and the barrier between visitors and hosts would be difficult to break, as the *Fastalogians* come from outer space and look probably different from humans (the *Fastalogians*' body is not compared to human body in terms of structure/formation at any moment of the story).

The dead body – the corpse – is found together with Carla, in the shape of an old man. Carla makes use of this old man in order to get money, what, in the story, is a common practice among people who need to raise money for funerals. The corpse is an important indicator of the body physical evidence around which human or living existence turns. The suggestion, made by Ivete Keil in "Diálogo sobre o corpo", is that "The dead body marks the presence of death and without it death ceases to exist. Besides denying death with cremation, we are creating a non-death imaginary"³ (KEIL and TIBURI, 2004, p. 121). Death resides in the dead body as well as life resides in the living body, if we deny death, we are consequently denying life. The body is the connector between both, the instrument that stands in the middle and constitutes the under bridge sustaining both phenomena. To conceive of life leads one to think about death as the most evident of its possible opposites.

The *Hups* are described by Paul, the narrator, as a group formed by freaks, or "people as romantically ugly as I had ever seen [...] Fault and infirmities were displayed with a pride that would have been alien to any but a *Hup*" (CAREY, 1993, p. 70). Among them, in meetings at Carla's place, are the dwarf and the hook-nosed lady, two characters that have rejected their bodies. Both of them met the beauty standard before their Chances and now are not seen as pure deformities only by their *Hup* fellows. The dwarf shows the others his beauty in a picture of himself lying on the beach and the hook-nosed lady is disclosed later to be Jane Larange, the "once beautiful and famous" actress. This is deemed by the revolutionaries to be the best way to fight, a way beyond Paul's comprehension, either because he has always been a proletarian or because he is so less concerned about a senseless DOA⁴ revolution than about where to get the money for his next six-pack of beer: "An idea was no worth to me, not worth fighting for. I would fight for a beer, a meal, a woman, but never an idea." (id, p. 64)

³ The translations concerning "Diálogo sobre o corpo" in this paper are made by the author of the latter.

⁴ Dead On Arrival. For Paul, it is impossible that the revolution works for something, or leads to a better future, which is the *Hups*' main objective, for him, this is the reason why the Revolution is not worth fighting.

In my reading, the situations when Paul faces Carla, the dwarf or the hook-nosed lady construct Paul's identity through the exclusion, the comparison, of the Other. If the Other starts to exist since his (the Other's) visibility to the Subject, these meetings are necessary to promote such a visibility. If the "vagabond" of bodies, represented by Paul, migrates from one body to another, it happens because this Subject cannot stay fixed in one body, for many reasons. The *Hups*, as ideologists, stop changing their bodies at the point they reach their short term objective – that is to have a certain kind of body. But Paul does not raise his objective concerning his organic body, not a final one. Paul perhaps has his body as a place for experiment/experience of several Chances, but out of this place – this body – his objectives are very personal. The characters of the story are constantly moving and interacting, getting close to each other and affirming their identities to themselves through their bodies.

Many questions are left open after the reading of "The Chance". How is a Chance actually made? Is it possible to bring it into effect out of fiction? How many Chances have we readers already made? How can an individual be the same individual after changing his body? What else does a Chance change, besides the body? And what remains? Notwithstanding, my aim here has been to find emergences of representation among the characters, their behavior and interaction, which could lead to describe these representations. So, I have analyzed the interaction between Paul, the main character and narrator of the story, and three other characters in particular: Carla, the dwarf and the hook-nosed lady.

For all these situations, events and dialogs, I believe that the body has also different meanings for each character. For Paul and the other "survivors" and "vagabonds" that the story does not point out directly but we can infer, the body is a place for experiment, a site for experience, whilst for the *Hups*, the body is an instrument for personal realization. Either way, it functions as means of excluding the Other, and there is also movement in the exclusion, as well as in these characters and their bodies, this exclusion goes back and forth in favor of the individual's identification.

Donna Haraway says that,

Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. (HARAWAY, 1999, p. 175)

That kind of writing comprehends Peter Carey's "The Chance". It is about the marks of the world, the observer and the vision of the Other and, mainly, the power to survive.

Notwithstanding, something lasts after a Chance, something that belongs to somewhere inside or outside the body, but definitely **not on** the body. I began my analysis searching indications and indicators of identity through bodily representation in the story, conceiving that identity can fit as one possible answer to the question, "what remains?" Now I close also with one questioning, in Donna Haraway's words: "Why should our bodies end at the skin [...]?"

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