

## Kazuo Ishiguro and the Service Economy

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**"Kazuo Ishiguro and the Service Economy"**

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**Abstract:** In her article, "Kazuo Ishiguro and the Service Economy," Kate Montague argues that Kazuo Ishiguro's novels enact a poetics of work for the present moment—not just at the level of narrative but also in the kind of language used to describe the service economies his characters are doomed to inhabit. In his best-known novels, a clinical, bureaucratic, and even glorifying lexicon of "donations," "completions," "substitutions," and "lifting" is betrayed by the reality of work grounded in horror. In Ishiguro's worlds, which are very much our own, the out-sourcing of reproductive and domestic labor is enabled by a larger system in which state technologies as well as linguistic forms mark certain bodies as readily exploitable and disposable. Looking comparatively between dystopian literary form and recent critical work on the service and care industries, the article shows how the tension between a euphemistic language of service and a social logic of mass death speaks to our own moment and to a crisis of care that, after years of austerity and now a global pandemic, defines the present.

**Kate MONTAGUE****Kazuo Ishiguro and the Service Economy**

In an essay on the Covid-19 pandemic published in the spring of 2020, novelist Kim Stanley Robinson claimed that "the virus is rewriting our imaginations," opening us up to new possibility. "What felt impossible has become thinkable. We're getting a different sense of our place in history. We know we're entering a new world, a new era. We seem to be learning our way into a new structure of feeling" (Robinson, "The Coronavirus"). Drawing on Raymond Williams' description of culture as that "least tangible," and affective "living result" of the "general organization" of a period (Williams 64), Robinson suggests the pandemic—the combined suddenness of its onset, its acceleration across the entire world, and the peculiar way it has necessitated a collective reckoning with imminent death—has somehow jolted our collective imagination out of the apathy of everyday life. Robinson argues that up until now, our social response to a range of economic and ecological crises has been one of stultifying passivity, a kind of unimaginative non-feeling. "We've been paralyzed," he insists, "living in the world without feeling it." Robinson relates this new emergent structure of feeling to how we think about work. He writes about his son, a service worker in a grocery store, who, like other key and essential workers during the pandemic "keep civilization running," providing the material conditions of possibility on which imagination might persist in the first place:

My son is now my hero: this is a good feeling. I think the same for all the people still working now for the sake of the rest of us. If we all keep thinking this way, the new structure of feeling will be better than the one that's dominated for the past forty years. (Robinson, "The Coronavirus")

What Robinson seems to imply is that this kind of work has been neglected, culturally if not in terms of livable remuneration, during a period that might be roughly aligned with the acceleration of neoliberalism. The pandemic has brought into sharp focus that work designated as "key" and "essential" is, more often than not, work that is simultaneously subjected to the underemployment and precarity that have characterized the entire labor market in recent decades. And yet, it is here that I want to suggest Robinson might have been overly optimistic in his hope that the pandemic delivers the circumstances where workers will be valorized in a material as opposed to symbolic way, not with public displays of clapping or rainbows in windows but with good wages, job security, and reasonable working hours. Writing this essay now, in March 2022, roughly two years since Robinson penned these words, it is hard to see the kinds of radical awakening that he refers to above. It is also hard to see any real change in the value and conditions of work; if anything, increasingly expensive living conditions combined with a state of on-going secular stagnation have meant that the conditions of work for the vast many are in a state of decline. If Robinson's most recent work of science fiction, *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), approaches climate catastrophe with a similarly hopeful impulse in its presentation of a future salvaged from the wreckage of the present, then this essay is interested in how literary form might articulate something else entirely: a world of totalized immiseration for which improvement seems insufficient if not impossible and in which the social immobility of those who must work in order to survive invites only the rejection of that world as a whole. Looking to another contemporary science fiction writer, Kazuo Ishiguro, this article will be interested in how worsening conditions of work, as felt acutely in the most precarious parts of the service and care sector, are mediated into dystopian fiction, and especially so in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and *Klara and the Sun* (2021). While both of these novels, in varying ways, reveal how the labor of exploited care and service work extracts its pound of flesh, I will be particularly interested in how *Klara and the Sun*—published during the pandemic—pushes this narrative concern with exploited work to its logical conclusion.

A surge of critical thinking on the material conditions of work has been published in the last two years, much of which is based in research that predates the pandemic but which has also, sometimes explicitly and other times implicitly, been refocused by its realities. Signal works in this field include Sarah Jaffe's *Work Won't Love You Back*, Aaron Benanav's *Automation and the Future of Work*, Jason E. Smith's *Smart Machines and Service Work*, Emma Dowling's *The Care Crisis*, and the multiauthor Care Collective's *The Care Manifesto*. Building on these works, in this essay the material conditions of service and care work as highlighted by the global pandemic will be read as symptoms of one of the defining features of the historical present: a terminal crisis in capitalist accumulation, felt acutely by the embodiments of living labor. Specifically, I am interested in the on-going degradation of work as it has intersected with the Covid-19 pandemic and in how these twin crises have come to a head in service-based economies such as the UK. Here, service work will be defined not only in terms of sales and

hospitality; the term will equally be used to express the kind of non-productive or immaterial work in which many in core states now find themselves employed. So Benanav has written in the context of the global off-shoring of productive industries in the second half of the twentieth century: "The vast majority of the world's underemployed workers therefore end up employed in the heterogeneous service sector, which accounts for between 70 and 80 percent of total employment in high income countries" (56). Along similar lines, Smith has characterized the growth of the service sector in response to de-industrialization: "As workforces in heavy industry were trimmed, many found employment in the growing service sectors, which began to swell in the 1960s, as workers displaced from capital-intensive industries were absorbed into sectors such as education and healthcare, government and finance, restaurants, retail, and 'business services'" (8-9).

The rapid growth of the service sector from the 1960s onwards, itself the result of a global division of labor, corresponds to the beginnings of what Robert Brenner has described as the long economic downturn, which underwrites the social declension we currently inhabit. This long downturn, characterized by secular stagnation, has important links to the cheapness and the non-productive character of the labor that abounds in service economies. Extending this account, and providing an essential linkage between these seemingly distant world-systemic trends and the unique cultural sensitivities on display in Ishiguro's fiction, Benanav notes that such "long periods of economic malaise" have been termed "Japanification" because of the ways "balance sheet stagnation" and its "onset of slower growth" (36) found something like a ground zero in Japan after the financial bubble burst in 1990. It is worth emphasizing here that the economic downturn, malaise, and stagnation described above are global phenomena that retain some degree of cultural and economic particularity. In this way, too, Ishiguro's novels speak to these large-scale global trends and, simultaneously, to how these trends register in different places and at different times. Ishiguro has spoken about how his migration from Japan to the UK in 1960, when he was five years old, haunts his novels in an imaginary way. "My imagination came alive," says Ishiguro, "when I wrote about Japan, something unlocked" ("Paris Review Interview"). While critical attention to the way Japan registers in Ishiguro's fiction is focused primarily on the earlier novels, more recent scholarship has interrogated how Japan—and here we might also say "Japanification"—migrates into the later fiction. In this context, Jane Hu has written about the ways that "economic stagnation" articulates an affective if not formal relationship between Japan and the UK across the span of Ishiguro's earlier and later work. According to Hu, the later fiction turns away "from Japanese national history and toward European, specifically British, history and its typical genres, shifting from narrating the postwar era of rising Japan to that of waning Britain" (126). Significantly, for the economic context I have described above, Hu suggests that, in Ishiguro's later novels, "Britain continued to represent Japan, the Japan that was now in economic stagnation" (126). While Hu, whose work represents the best materialist criticism of Ishiguro, reads economic downturn in the context of declining empires, I want to engage here with how the material histories and lived experiences of labor then provide these novels with their deeply affective, melancholic singularity—indeed, labor, and especially care and service work, will go some way to explaining why we might feel the way we do when reading these stories of clones and robots.

Terms such as immaterial" or "affective labor" have become popular in recent years to describe the shift toward "non-productive" work in the period that both Benanav and Smith refer to above. Michael Hardt writes in his essay on affective labor:

The term service here covers a large range of activities from health care, education, and finance, to transportation, entertainment, and advertising. The jobs, for the most part, are highly mobile and involve flexible skills. More importantly, they are characterized in general by the central role played by knowledge, information, communication, and affect. (91)

It is "in this sense," writes Hardt, that "we can call the postindustrial economy an informational economy" (91). For the purposes of this essay, I will be particularly focused on those service jobs which intersect with different kinds of care work, and which can be further classified as relying on the worker's performance of feeling or affect. While it is true that the majority of waged work, and especially underemployed work, now takes place within this large and heterogeneous service sector, and while Hardt describes this economy as primarily "informational," this essay will interrogate the intersection of waged work with unwaged reproductive activities, or, in other terms, with the work of social reproduction which has long been exploited. While "working from home" has become a kind of slogan, particularly for the professional middle classes, the pandemic has also helped draw attention to the vast amount of work that goes on unpaid at home, or which is outsourced under conditions of underemployment. In this context, Silvia Federici writes that while "Affective Labor" is used to describe new work activities in

the service sector and to conceptualize the nature of work in the "'post-Fordist' era," for others it is also a "synonym for 'reproductive work'" (59). To be sure, the rise of the service sector and its attendant affective economy is in part a response to the commercialization of reproductive work whereby, in Federici's words, the "bulk of industrial labor has actually 'spilled' into the 'Third World,'" while the service sector has witnessed a spilling "from the home, not from the factory" (63). In short, service and care work cannot be de-coupled from unwaged work, and it is in this relation that underemployment and exploitation in the service sector meet servitude in the domestic sphere.

The argument to follow is that Ishiguro's science fiction provides a unique expression of these dynamics—and not just because of its predilection toward dystopian narratives revolving around work but also in its preoccupation with crisis and contradiction as it is lived by service and care workers. The inhuman, variously cloned, and robotic service and care workers of Ishiguro's recent novels, *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*, can be seen to embody the particular kind of perverse logic of work today, which finds its symptoms in the commodification of affect, in the sacrifice of key and essential workers, in the outsourcing of domestic labor, and in the relationships between waged and unwaged work, immaterial and material labor, and production and reproduction, to name just a few. In different terms, the Warwick Research Collective authors have understood Robinson's 2012 sci-fi novel *2312* as explicitly describing "late capitalism as riven by unevenness—an unstable formation that rocks between residuality and emergence" (71). Contradiction, read here as temporal unevenness, is one way to think about how Ishiguro's projection towards the dystopia of a fully automated future may tell us more about crisis as it is embodied by the workers of our present. Moving further backwards in time, it might also help us consider how the conditions of work in the present are symptomatic of a longer history of terminal crisis in capital. This investment in the present, as a site of both residuality and emergence, is something that Robinson sees as internal to science fiction more generally. Referring to *The Ministry for the Future* in a recent interview, Robinson suggested that science fiction writers are concerned less with "trying to predict the future" and more with "running scenarios for their current political lessons, if there are any" ("Rolling Stone Interview"). If the political lesson of *The Ministry for the Future* is how to initiate a radical global response to climate change in such a way that a mass extinction event might be averted, then I want to suggest that Ishiguro's harnessing of hope's antinomy, despair, might have similarly important lessons to teach us about conditions of work in the present. More precisely, I want to us to think about how the shared immiseration of Ishiguro's characters might provide the grounds upon which an alienated and atomized labor force becomes fully conscious of its fate and perhaps, therefore, the narrative substance from which transformative collective action might flourish.

### **Affective Crises**

*Klara and the Sun* resonates eerily with the realities of the pandemic, and not only because of its publication in 2021. Its narrative content could just about describe the historical present: a strange sickness brought about by the genetic engineering of wealthy children, or their "lifting," to have them better compete for increasingly scarce jobs; mass unemployment and state-sanctioned isolation and homeschooling because of "substitutions" of living labor with machines; a corresponding new structure of feeling defined by loneliness and isolation; and, giving all of this its affective anchor and narrative focalization, the outsourcing of service and care to cyborg workers used up and then discarded or left to "fade" on a literal scrap heap of other automata. Whereas Ishiguro ties the above scenarios to the automation of work, we could easily substitute the pandemic as their cause. With all of this, Ishiguro's novel reads as less a work about the catastrophes of a fully automated future and more like a mediation on the crisis of work for service and care workers in the present. Before pursuing this reading further though, it will be necessary to account for the crisis of care work as it intersects with a more systemic crisis in capital, as this is the social bassline atop which Ishiguro's novel unfurls.

Robinson's remarks about encountering a world in crisis by simply not-feeling echoes the kind of non-caring ideology that The Care Collective describe at the beginning of their 2020 manifesto on the crisis of care work: "Our world is one in which carelessness reigns," they write. "The coronavirus pandemic merely highlights this ongoing carelessness in many countries, including the USA, the UK and Brazil" (1). They argue that, despite society's dependence on the work of care, care workers have been, and remain, undervalued to the point of exhaustion. "Neoliberalism," they argue, "has neither an effective practice of, nor a vocabulary for, care. This has wrought devastating consequences" (3-4). Rather than the pandemic making people care more, The Care Collective think about carelessness as a structure of feeling that has much deeper structural roots in capitalism. Here, the crisis of care is not only symptomatic of new neoliberal logics of work in post-Fordist or de-industrialized economies, but of

a much longer devaluation of "unproductive" and unwaged domestic care and service work. In this context, Annie McClanahan offers a useful rejoinder to the characterization of the "archetypal neoliberal subject" as entrepreneur:

if the exemplary (if nowhere near exclusive) representative of industrial work in the first half of the twentieth century was a white, male, unionized manufacturing worker, the exemplary representative of work in the age of deindustrialization is non-white and female, working the sphere of reproductive labor (teaching, child-care, elder-care, nursing) or in low end service work, for low wages and with little protection either by unions or the state.

These same workers have been on the frontline of the pandemic, brought daily into contaminated workplaces and households in order to provide different kinds of "unproductive" labor—or, using the language of Marxist-feminism, to enact the work of social reproduction.

Like The Care Collective, Nancy Fraser has unpacked the "crisis of care" in relation to contradictions within capitalism and its reliance on social reproduction. Defining "social reproduction" as "both affective and material labor, and often performed without pay," Fraser emphasizes the indispensability of this work to society, while simultaneously accounting for the ways it has been "systematically" undermined throughout the history of capitalism: "No society that systematically undermines social reproduction can endure for long. Today, however, a new form of capitalist society is doing just that. The result is a major crisis, not simply of care, but of social reproduction in this broader sense." While Fraser frames this as the "social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism," she argues that today, we occupy a situation where the work of social reproduction, as embodied by the care worker, has become externalized or outsourced:

As well as diminishing public provision and recruiting women into waged work, financialized capitalism has reduced real wages, thus raising the numbers of hours of paid work per household needed to support a family and prompting a desperate scramble to transfer carework to others. To fill the "care gap," the regime imports migrant workers from poorer to richer countries. Typically, it is racialized, often rural women from poor regions who take on the reproductive and caring labor previously performed by more privileged women. But to do this, the migrants must transfer their own familial and community responsibilities to other, still poorer caregivers, who must in turn to do the same—and on and on, in ever longer "global care chains."

In terms that are significant for thinking about the role of robot and clone service and care workers in Ishiguro's novels, this outsourcing and its displacement into "global care chains" intersects with the technical outsourcing of reproductive labor from egg-freezing to surrogacy and breast pumps, whereby exploited workers, many if not most of whom are women, become appendages to reproductive technology.

Drawing a line between the conditions of work in the service and care industries and the large-scale crisis in the capitalist world-system, Benanav has summed up the current crisis in work as one in which "economies have been growing at a progressively slower pace" due to "decades of industrial overcapacity," a dynamic that has "killed the manufacturing growth engine, and no alternative to it has been found, least of all in the slow-growing, low productivity activities that make up the bulk of the service sector" (x). Inspired by Brenner, Benanav writes that the switch to a service-based economy in the period of deindustrialization has coincided with a "long downturn" (x) of economic growth, which has itself led to worsening conditions of work, the stagnation of wages, and systemic underemployment, to name only the most acute stressors that plague the service and care industries. If, in industrial phases of capitalism, what Marx described as the "moving contradiction" articulated a situation of economic deflation in the face of rising unemployment because of the replacement of living labor with machines, the current economic downturn within the context of a service economy cannot be explained in the same terms. Describing the present situation, Benanav turns to science fiction:

As economic growth decelerates, rates of job creation slow, and it is this, not technological-induced job destruction, that has depressed the global demand for labor. Put on the reality-vision glasses of John Carpenter's *They Live*, which allowed the protagonist of that film to see the truth in advertising, and it is easy to see a world not of shiny new automated factories and ping-pong-playing consumer robots, but of crumbling infrastructures, deindustrialized cities, harried nurses, and underpaid salespeople, as well as a massive stock of financialized capital with dwindling places to invest itself. (x-xi)

The illustrative example, John Carpenter's film, might also have lessons to teach us simply by virtue of its being a work of narrative art. Specifically, the narrative forms of science fiction offer a way of

mediating both the new realities of the Covid-19 pandemic and the more drawn-out crisis facing work where underemployment and debt have increased exponentially against the spoils of entrepreneurship and financial speculation.

All of which brings us to Ishiguro's novel, in which the eponymous Klara AF, a kind of advanced automaton—where AF stands for artificial friend—is not the robot that *will* replace the harried care worker; she *is* the harried care worker who, for all intents and purposes, has been dehumanized to the point of becoming machine. In this sense, Klara embodies the contradiction that Fraser describes between production and reproduction, between ostensibly material (machine-commodity) and immaterial (service-care) labor: she is the material product of technologically advanced industry, but also a living and emotionally sensitive worker within a service-based economy, manufactured to provide care and companionship. How, then, do we read the narrative presentation of a caring automaton, and in particular its elevation to focalizing consciousness, against this historical backdrop?

### **Kazuo Ishiguro and Automation**

The service and care workers who inhabit *Klara and the Sun* and its spiritual prequel, *Never Let Me Go*, are fully automated machines and clones, replacing human labor with inhuman processes. Like the palliative care worker and eventual organ "donor" Kathy H., the narrative focalizer in *Never Let Me Go*, as well as Stevens the butler from Ishiguro's earlier novel, *Remains of The Day* (1989), Klara is a character whose narrative trajectory is bound up in service and care as it intersects with human mortality. She is, in the first instance, purchased to provide domestic companionship to a child named Josie. Perhaps even more tragic than Klara's eventual "slow fade" into oblivion, Kathy H. in *Never Let Me Go* works as a kind of death doula in a world where cloned children are brought up in orphanage-style schools to become organ donors to their human counterparts, an extractive process that will eventually bring about their "completion," the euphemism for their death. Kathy H. takes care of the donors, helping them to prepare for and recover from donations, before she herself must donate her own organs. Both *Klara and the Sun* and *Never Let Me Go* present a world in which the "habits of the heart," as David Harvey describes human affection under conditions of neoliberalism (3), have become automated and even cloned for entry into a larger service economy where care and familial bonds, and so many other forms of social reproduction, are outsourced by members of one class to another. While Ishiguro follows one of science fiction's dominant tropes, presenting automation as a crisis of consciousness (asking: Do these machines have a soul? Do the androids dream of electric sheep?), it also reveals the material circumstances under which the service economy intersects with a servant economy, which incorporates both waged and unwaged work. For Ishiguro, automation effectively collapses the categories between machine and human labor, between service and servitude.

Questions of automation and technology, and industrializing service and care work, as well as reproductive labor are certainly not new. Feminists such as Shulamith Firestone, Angela Davis, and more recently Sophie Lewis have documented how the technical means of production might indeed be harnessed or seized in order to liberate women from the exploitive and unpaid reproductive work that goes on at home. As Davis writes:

One of the most closely guarded secrets of advanced capitalist societies involves the possibility—the real possibility—of radically transforming the nature of housework. A substantial part of the housewife's domestic tasks can actually be incorporated into the industrial economy. In other words, housework needs no longer be considered necessarily and unalterably private in character. Teams of trained and well-paid workers, moving from dwelling to dwelling, engineering technologically advanced cleaning machinery, could swiftly and efficiently accomplish what the present day housewife does so arduously and primitively. Why the shroud of silence surrounding this potential of radically redefining the nature of domestic labor? (201)

Here it will be worth asking, following this scenario, if Ishiguro's otherwise dystopic novels harbor a utopian impulse in their visions of a future where advanced automata take on the unwaged service and care work in the home, leaving a single mother, like Josie's, able to pursue a successful career? It would be hard to make such a case, not least because of the resolutely melancholic feelings that attend to this automated future, but also because of how this future is, like our present, classed, and how it so critically replicates the logic of capitalist labor markets. While automation may mean that Josie's middle-class mother can be a successful career woman, and that Josie can be genetically enhanced, or receive the homeschooling and companionship necessary to follow in her mother's footsteps, things are very different for the single mother next door, who lives in a dilapidated house with her son, Rick. This is not a world where the exploited have seized the technical means of production and reproduction to engineer an egalitarian social system. Instead, as Lewis describes the social order we still inhabit, "the whole

world deserves to reap the benefits of already available techniques currently monopolized by capitalism's elites. It is the political struggle for access and control—the commoning or communization of reprotch—that matters most." (29) The fully, or mostly, automated future that we encounter in both *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun* is one in which technological "fixes" only benefit the few and at the expense of the many.

In *Klara and the Sun*, the social conditions of this narrative are readily legible. Klara's tale takes place alongside automation of a labor market where workers are replaced by robots and machines, and where a child's prospects for social mobility are tied to their ownership of the means of production—to genetic modification and the purchasing of AFs like Klara. The novel also gestures towards increasing social dissolution and fragmentation that this automation generates: class divisions and political antagonism are sharpened between those who have access to these technologies and those who don't, as we see play out in relation to Josie's relationship with Rick and his mother. Rick is ridiculed by other "lifted" children and pitied by parents who see him as having no future. In short, this is a capitalist world in which care work is alienated along "global supply chains" and denied to the most precarious workers in society. There can be no "communing" or "communization" of technology unless there is a revolution in the mode of production, of which there is barely even a suggestion in these novels.

In Ishiguro's novel, much like our contemporary world, capitalist social relations determine the uses of technology in the service industries. From within this context, Smith writes that Covid-19 has refocused attention on the automation of service and care work, so that "warehouse workers, grocery store clerks, hospital staff, and delivery drivers might, it is argued, be kept safe from exposure to the deadly virus if automated devices are deployed to perform these tasks in their place" (12). And yet, in an age of advanced technological development, there is no real incentive for capital to automate the cheapest and most exploited kinds of labor: "When workers will take jobs that are poorly paid because nothing else is available, there is little reason for business owners to invest in expensive and soon obsolete machinery to do their work" (11). In addition to the ready availability of cheap labor, Smith asserts, "the types of labor processes many automation theorists suggest are vulnerable to replacement by smart machines in fact require an intuitive, embodied, and socially mediated form of knowledge or skill that even the most advanced machine-learning programs cannot master" (11). The central narrative consciousness of *Klara and the Sun* registers these contradictions; on the one hand, Klara embodies precisely the kind of smart machine that has evolved to incorporate all these "intuitive, embodied, and socially mediated" forms of knowledge and skill. On the other hand, she is a place holder for the way the *human* service and care worker has become automated and commodified, precisely because of their designation as cheap labor that can be readily exploited in the labor market. While the novel's narrative content presents the substitution of human labor with mechanical processes in an age where smart machines have the capabilities to perform the affect required in the service and care industries, it also articulates, in a more sinister way, how human labor in those industries is already dehumanized to the point of automation. Here, Klara is not so different from the cleaner, or carer, or nanny inhabiting the domestic setting of this or that middle-class household, a ubiquitous figure who might or might not be paid a wage, but in either case is exploited for the cheap domestic work they provide, which is invariably valued at a higher rate than their wage. We need only think of the trend for live-in au pairs, typically young women from other countries who provide domestic work in exchange for lodging and sometimes "pocket money," or contracted cleaners—again, typically immigrant women—who undertake back-breaking and emotionally draining domestic work in exchange for minimal wages.

The exploitative nature of this work has been highlighted throughout the pandemic where these same workers—through various lockdowns—have continued to be sent into homes, amounting to potentially deadly work spaces. According to ONS figures, men and women working in "caring, leisure, and other service occupations" have had some of the highest mortality rates for Covid-19. As Smith argues, within the current capitalist logic, workers replaced by machine, far from being protected from dangerous work conditions, would be further displaced into a growing reserve army of the unemployed, forced to look for cheaper and even more precarious work. What the pandemic might have revealed is something we knew all along: employers, the government, entire populations and communities of people are more than willing to sacrifice the lives of cheap labor where "essential" or "key" work is coincident with that of the "servant" and is also "compulsory." Ishiguro's novels clarify this revelation with astonishing punctuality. Klara lives to serve Josie until her use-value has expired (at which point she is left in a utility cupboard before being abandoned in a rubbish dump of other AFs). Via Klara, the worker and commodity are brought into direct confluence; in both instances, as both worker and commodity, Klara's entire use-value constitutes the care and service she is designed to provide for the child and family who buy her. It is in this sense, and not just because she is a machine, that she is radically dehumanized.



Here the automation of service and care combines with an economic logic of domestic servitude and slavery. This is not to suggest that automation is equivalent with slavery, or even functions as a kind of allegory to slavery, but rather that the un-waged worker is racialized and gendered in ways that mediate between what some have termed "the servant economy" and the material histories of slavery. In this novel, racialized and gendered servitude forms a kind of textual unconscious to descriptions of a labor market where domestic workers are quite literally bought and sold, and later left for dead. Ishiguro is keenly sensitive to the racialization and gendering of service work and the dehumanization of non-white female workers. As Hu has argued, "Ishiguro's Asian Anglophone historical novels all feature anachronistic or aging protagonists who narrate history from the perspective of a later present—a perspective that comes, increasingly, to capture both Japan and Britain in the era of late twentieth-century American empire" (146). Even if the key service and care workers in *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun* are neither Asian nor Japanese, unlike the characters in many of Ishiguro's historical novels, there is an argument to be made elsewhere that such perspective persists at the levels of tone and timbre. More specifically, however, in *Klara and the Sun*, the chief domestic servant in the household to which Klara is sold, Melanie Housekeeper, is given a non-descript non-English speaking vernacular as if to register the outsourcing of housework. This detail is socially accurate. "Today, millions of black and migrant women," write Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser, "are employed as caregivers and domestic workers. Often undocumented and far from their families, they are simultaneously exploited and expropriated—forced to work precariously and on the cheap, deprived of rights, and subject to abuses of every stripe" (45). Towards the end of the novel, Melanie Housekeeper is simply replaced by another robot. Nothing more is said, and we are left to assume that she too has been left to "fade" in the rubbish heap of other used-up workers. While there is little conviviality between Klara and Melanie Housekeeper—Melanie Housekeeper even seems to harbor animosity toward Klara as if to register the disaggregation of their workforce—in one memorable instance, Melanie articulates some kind of shared solidarity in the form of their shared care work for Josie: "'How fuck I know enough? I want go with Miss Josie, Ma'am say no way. Take AF instead. Can't figure it. So you stick close Miss Josie, specially when Mr Son Bitch around. You do best, AF. We same side'" (177). This "same side" to which Melanie Housekeeper refers is rendered in terms of self-sacrifice; on this trip with Josie, Klara will drain her own brain fluid in an attempt to protect her. This is the kind of sacrifice that Saidiya Hartman has written about in the context of slavery and the racialization of service work: "The servant in the house—the ubiquitous figure of the captive maternal—was conscripted to be friend, nurse, confidante, nanny, and bed-warmer" and "expected to be grateful" as if "sacrificial devotion" was her "sole" talent and reason for being (233-234). For Hartman, service work in this sense possesses the "entire person" so that "labor-time" coincides with "her lifetime" (233).

### Keywords to the Contemporary

We know from Raymond Williams that words are linked both to political economies and their related structures of feeling. Patrick O'Leary pursues this relationship between language, political economy, and structures of feeling in his recent book, *Keywords: The New Language of Capitalism*. For example, Leary writes that words and phrases like

**best practices** and **human capital**, are relatively new coinages that teach us to thrive by applying the lessons of a competitive **marketplace** to every sphere of life. And they all model a kind of ideal personality: someone who is indefatigable, restless, and flexible, always ready to accommodate the shocks of the global economy and the more mundane disruptions of working life, from unpredictable scheduling in service work to reduced parental leave and the outsourcing of more and more administrative tasks to fewer and fewer employees. (4)

The "personality" described here echoes the "archetypal neoliberal subject" which would perhaps be ill-suited to the work of care. And yet, here a line is drawn between the two in ways that give shape to work's subsumption of feeling as "human capital" as well as its increasing precarity. Drawing directly from Williams, O'Leary writes that keywords are "elements of a living vocabulary that shape and reflect a society in movement," and that "keywords are therefore 'key' in a soluble sense: they are important, and they unlock something hidden" (5).

Here I want to think about how keywords in Ishiguro's novels articulate the material experience of work in our service and care economies. Specifically, I am interested in how the kinds of diction that Ishiguro develops speak to various contradictions within the labor market today. Reading this vocabulary of service and care will also return us to thinking about the tension between the affective economy and the kind of affectless or non-feeling present that we are said to inhabit. One of the stylistic signatures

of Ishiguro's novels, and particularly his three novels concerned with service and care workers, are the lexical worlds within which he furnishes these jobs and their workers. In all three novels, particular words register something of the technical and clinical or even affectless nature of automated work, while simultaneously repressing the material horror of this reality; I want to suggest that the material horror hidden, or even sublimated, into the diction of Ishiguro's novels reveals the material reality of our contemporary structure of feeling.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the central narrator Kathy H. introduces us first to the term "donors" and "donations" in the opening pages of the novel in a matter-of-fact description of her job as a carer:

My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as "agitated," even before fourth donation. Okay, maybe I *am* boasting now. But it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well, especially that bit about my donors staying "calm." (3)

We soon discover that this work, and these terms, are synonymous with organ harvesting, and that the calm countenance of her clients when making a fourth donation, which Kathy H. refers to here, is more than often the moment of their "completion," where the donor experiences complete and catastrophic biological failure and inevitable death. That work itself is described as a "donation" here might even have us thinking about how Marx writes about the "free gifts of nature":

Natural elements entering as agents into production, and which cost nothing, no matter what role they play in production, do not enter as components of capital, but as a free gift of Nature to capital, that is, as a free gift of Nature's productive power to labour, which, however, appears as the productiveness of capital, as all other productivity under the capitalist mode of production. (745)

What "donation" then reveals is that the donating body as worker registers as violable nature in the same way that other resources do as they enter production as raw materials. That the "donors" in Ishiguro's novels are effectively reduced to raw materials, in the most literal and visceral of ways, redoubles the horror of this clinical language used to describe the work. It also reframes the connections between housework, social reproduction, and the histories of slavery and colonization within which the living labor and raw materials are ruthlessly exploited and extracted. Here we might think about what Maria Mies terms "the double-faced processes of colonization and housewifization," namely the "the processes and policies by which other countries and women are defined as 'nature', or made into colonies to be exploited by WHITE MAN in the name of capital accumulation or progress and civilization" (4).

"Completion" likewise functions here as a clinically rational way to denote the exhaustion of one's material being, but it also functions euphemistically insofar as it conceals the horror of the reality under which that exhaustion takes place. Service work in this novel is tantamount to the most gruesome kind of self-sacrifice, which one might expect would produce a whole range of feelings from the "donors." And yet, the reality of this work is met with an almost entrepreneurial interest in how best to position oneself within this market. O'Leary's interrogation of "human capital" as a keyword in today's labor markets might prove useful here. That Kathy H. appears passionate about doing her "work well" reveals something about an individual's identification of themselves with work, to the point that labor in O'Leary's terms becomes their "life's work," which we can take quite literally in the case of Kathy H.

In *Klara and the Sun*, a similarly euphemistic or forcibly naïve diction conceals horror within a vocabulary of care. Klara is bought to provide "companionship," which is tantamount to unpaid domestic servitude. While "companionship" registers care work as a relationship of love (like romantic partnership or friendship or even kinship), Klara's designation as "AF" betrays the outsourcing, commodification, and indeed automation of that companionship: she will always be an "artificial" friend. In a similar manner, children are genetically "lifted" to reach their potential, and be the most competitive they can within a mostly automated market. While "lifting" might fit into any kind of language for up-grading, or up-selling, a kind of upward social mobility enabled only via eugenics, it also registers directly within the novel's economy of death, as it does here when Josie's mother explains her decision to "lift" Josie even though her other daughter, Sal, became sick and died from a similar procedure:

"I don't blame Paul. He's entitled to his feelings. After Sal, he said we shouldn't risk it. So what if Josie doesn't get lifted? Plenty of kids aren't. But I could never have that for Josie. I wanted the best for her. I wanted her to have a good life. You understand, Klara. I called it, and now Josie's sick. Because of what I decided. You see how it feels for me?" (213)

Here, being competitive within the world, and possibly attaining the "good life," directly reveals the logic of capitalism for the death trap it is, in which social mobility is the upside to social murder.

### Affective Persistence

If Ishiguro's language articulates the automation of labor while sublimating the affective horror of that process, I now want to conclude by suggesting that the very distinct narrative voices that furnish these dystopian worlds function in a similar way. Both *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun* are first-person narratives, told from the perspective of their variously cloned and automated central protagonists. In the opening lines of the latter novel, Klara describes the placement of her and another AF within the shop: "When we were new, Rosa and I were mid-store, on the magazines table side, and could see through more than half of the window. So we were able to watch the outside—the office workers hurrying by, the taxis, the runners, the tourists, Beggar Man and his dog, the lower part of the RPO building" (1). Line after line, we get this kind of prosaic observation from the perspective of Klara, who longs to see the outside world "in all its detail" and yet remains detached from that world; to return to Robinson's phrasing, this voice bears witness to a world without really feeling it. The tension articulates in some respects a deeply realist impulse behind Klara's descriptive observations insofar as the world that is described—in all its mundane and ordinary detail—is made overly familiar; and yet, the automated consciousness through which this world is mediated constantly defamiliarizes and even estranges that world. In short, I want to suggest that this is the narrative consciousness of alienation: the voice of living and working in a world from which the individual is detached and estranged.

All throughout the novel, Klara's narrative voice is made distinctive by distortions in her visual field; the detailed description of familiar scenery is constantly broken up into fragments, or more accurately "boxes," as if life itself is to be catalogued within a moving grid. This is just one description of what Klara sees out of her window while on a car trip with Josie's mother:

Soon the scenes were changing so rapidly around me I had difficulty ordering them. At one stage a box became filled with the other cars, while the boxes immediately beside it filled with segments of road and surrounding field. I did my best to preserve the smooth line of the road as it moved from one box into the next, but with the view constantly changing, I decided this wasn't possible, and allowed the road to break and start afresh each time it crossed a border. (97)

Here, and elsewhere, the mechanical apparatus of automation reveals itself within the narrative as if the narrative apparatus were speaking, or learning, like a paint-by-numbers in which events and scenery exist only to fill a quota of realist detail. Again, all that might be familiar here—the road, the cars, and surrounding fields—are rearranged into separate compartments in such a way that each compartment registers a detachment from the other, and the narrator has to give up on any sense of continuity or smoothness within the scene. For the reader too, so closely attached to the first-person perspective of Klara, the effect of this is alienating.

Nowhere is this estrangement registered more starkly—and in relation to her service and care work—than in passages where Klara describes the effects of her trepanning, which she agrees to in an attempt to make Josie better. It is the father who first suggests the experiment in a manner that recalls the procedural donations of *Never Let Me Go*: "Just a small incision. Below the ear. Either ear would do. We'd require a tool, something with a sharp point or edge. We need only to pierce the outer layer. Beyond that, well, there should be a small valve that I can open, then tighten back again with my fingers" (227). The scene of the procedure is not narrated directly, which is peculiar within a novel where everything that Klara witnesses is recorded. Perhaps narrative consciousness meets its limits when operated upon, and instead the event is recollected in memory fragments that interrupt the following scenes:

Miss Helen was watching silently, a gentle smile on her face, her glance moving from Mr Vance to Rick's notebooks. At that moment, I felt once more, fleetingly but vividly, the Father's hand holding my head at the required angle, and hear the trickling noise as the fluid entered the plastic bottle he was holding up close to my face with his other hand. (248)

The procedure is also hinted at in the cognitive dissonance and temporal shifts that occur within Klara's perceptive field: "I was no longer certain that the effects from what had occurred in the yard weren't growing more pronounced with the passing minutes, and that my new condition wouldn't become obvious to everyone if I attempted to negotiate the unfamiliar terrain outdoors" (233). While Klara registers an increasing sense of anxiety and disturbance at what has occurred, the tone and timbre of

her voice remain unaffected in the pragmatic and detached assessment of her own lobotomy. While consciousness itself has been operated on—or at least its robotic equivalent—we are made all too aware that this is not just any kind of consciousness. This is the leaky brain fluid of automata and so the effects are described, like everything else in the novel, at a surface level—as if negating interiority, and the feelings and affects which attach to it, altogether. Here, narrative consciousness seems all too aware of this play with surfaces: "Someone was tugging my arm, but before me now were so many fragments they appeared like a solid wall. I'd also started to suspect that many of these shapes weren't really even three-dimensional, but had been sketched on flat surfaces using clever shading techniques to give the illusion of roundness and depth" (238). There is something almost cinematic here, in this montage-like description of the landscape, but more than that 3D becomes 2D just as roundness and depth give way to shapes and surfaces.

If, for György Lukács, the novel "tells of the adventures of interiority," and if "the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself" (89), then in this novel, "interiority" or the "soul" is registered on the surface of both machine and text in such a way that narrative consciousness is reconfigured. While in this essay I have wanted to say that these literary effects give form and shape to the systemic exploitation of the service and care worker, there are also moments when it is as if something leaks through and even stains the detached purview of narration. At the end of the novel, when Klara has been left to a slow fade in a junk yard, narration returns to a kind of stream of consciousness, but this time, rather than describing the scene around her, it turns inward:

Over the last few days, some of my memories have started to overlap in curious ways. For instance, the dark sky morning when the Sun saved Josie, the trip to Morgan's Falls and the illuminated diner Mr Vance chose will come into my mind, merged together into a single setting. The Mother will be standing with her back to me, watching the mist from the waterfall. Yet I am not watching her from the wooden picnic bench, but instead from my booth in Mr Vance's diner. And although Mr Vance isn't visible, I can hear his unkind words coming from across the aisle. Meanwhile, above the Mother and the waterfall, the dark clouds have gathered, the same dark clouds that gathered the morning the Sun saved Josie, small cylinders and pyramids flying by in the wind. (301)

In the sensible syntax and ordered grammar, this stream of consciousness registers its own automation. The passage betrays an impulse to order and analyze the memories in the same way that Klara records every other detail of her surroundings; and yet, affect persists in melancholy: conjuring up people and scenes no longer available, in a consciousness that is slowly but surely fading, now isolated and alone.

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