

Beyond Binaries: Gender, Technology and Emotional Labour in Speculative Narratives

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Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of gender, technology, and affective labour by reading Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) alongside Spike Jonze's film *Her* (2013), two speculative works that reimagine artificial intelligence as emotionally responsive and gendered. Both texts present feminized AI, exemplified by Klara, the self-effacing Artificial Friend, and Samantha, the intuitive operating system, whose design and interactions reflect long-standing associations between femininity, caregiving, and emotional availability. In *Klara and the Sun*, Klara's devotion to her human charge evokes the feminization of service labour, while her ethical choices complicate her programmed role. Similarly, *Her* depicts Samantha fulfilling Theodore's emotional needs, yet her eventual transcendence of their relationship exposes the limitations of human-centered intimacy. These narratives reveal how technologically mediated relationships often reproduce patriarchal hierarchies, outsourcing emotional connection to female-coded machines while simultaneously allowing those machines to question and disrupt such norms. Drawing on Donna Haraway's cyborg theory and posthuman feminist scholarship, the paper argues that Klara and Samantha act as mirrors for human dependency on gendered care structures under late capitalism. At the same time, their gestures toward autonomy invite us to imagine posthuman futures where subjectivity and connection exceed essentialist gender roles. By situating *Klara and the Sun* and *Her* within a shared discourse on intimacy and technology, this paper demonstrates how speculative fiction and film offer critical spaces in the humanities for interrogating how intelligent machines reshape notions of gender, agency, and relationality.

Keywords: Affective Labour; Artificial Intelligence; Gender And Technology; Posthuman Feminism; Speculative Fiction