

Did *Spirited Away* Dream of Third-Wave Feminism?

From Identity Labor to Care Labor¹

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If we are to name one “author” who has contributed most to our thinking about women and labor, it would be Hayao Miyazaki, the Japanese animation film director whose life’s work seems to center on the problem of work and labor, and who is a prominent creator of attractive female characters like Nausicaä and Kushana from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), Kiki from *Kiki’s Delivery Service* (1989), San and Lady Eboshi from *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and Chihiro/Sen from *Spirited Away* (2001). These female characters, however, are not “attractive” in a conventional sense: that is, they are not attractive for their femininity. Rather, they are attractive because of their outstanding ability to fight and/or work in spite of the fact that they are women. (Of course, Chihiro doesn’t seem to conform to this pattern at first sight—her figure is a dialectical result of Miyazaki’s thinking on female labor, as will be shown later.)

Why women? Why didn’t Miyazaki choose men as his protagonists? In this essay, I argue that Miyazaki’s works are the expression of more general ideas about female labor, or labor in general, in what I define here as the postfeminist era. Beginning with a discussion about how general ideologies underpinning our neoliberal/postfeminist/post-Fordist age are expressed most clearly in female characters in popular cultural works including those of Miyazaki, this essay will go on to discuss how female labor is treated in *Kiki’s Delivery Service* and *Spirited Away*. Analyses of these works will reveal

that they are fine expressions of the ideological configurations of our world of work and labor today.

Postfeminism and the New Spirit of Capitalism

Is *Star Wars: Force Awakens* (2015) a feminist film? Yes, we could say it is, as its female hero Rey, who makes a strong impression as a female warrior, refusing the helping hand of Finn and fighting her own way through, can be seen as a feminist hero of a new generation (her mother-daughter relationship with Leia is quite telling as Leia—together with the strong feminist inclination of the actor Carrie Fisher herself—figures as a second-wave feminist personality, although reduced to the paradigmatic role of “princess”; Rey seems free of any of the constraints under which Leia seemed to be struggling). But is she really a groundbreaking character? The answer is no. This can be shown from the impression one might get from the very opening scene of *Star Wars*, in which Rey, as a “scavenger,” searches the ruin of an imperial battleship Star Destroyer for junk mechanical parts. Those who are familiar with Miyazaki’s works will not miss her similarity to (I would call this an homage to) Nausicaä at the beginning of the film where she performs a similar search into the Toxic Jungle (compare plates 1 and 2). Actually, the director J. J. Abrams was explicit about his admiration for Miyazaki when he came to Japan (D Nee). The similarity between Rey and Nausicaä does not end with their appearances. The fighting skills and the prowess of both of them are similarly made salient by the contrasts with male characters (with Finn in the case of Rey and with Asbel in the case of Nausicaä), and this leads us to wonder if Nausicaä’s rifle and Rey’s club in the plates below might not look very similar, perhaps representing the same thing: the phallus.

If Nausicaä precedes Rey by the vast space of thirty years, we need some reservations in declaring Rey as a new feminist hero. Rather, we might need to see her as a historically *typical* character. Her typicality

can be shown by taking a look at the tradition of “princesses” in Disney films (and we could say that Miyazaki films and *Star Wars* are also now Disney films, as Disney distributes DVDs from Studio Ghibli and has bought Lucasfilm). Disney’s “princess” films took a turn during the 1980s and the 90s, and after the 2000s we are seeing further developments unfolding from that movement. Disney started from anti-feminist figure of Snow White in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), which is basically about Snow White’s training as a housewife



Plate 1



Plate 2

aiming at marriage as the final goal. This figure is taken over to *Cinderella* (1950) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959).²

It is in *The Little Mermaid* that we see Disney's turn, as it were, to the self-criticism of its own tradition. Princess Ariel strives to break free from the fetters that her father King Triton imposes on her. In my view, the decisive turn comes with *Mulan* (1998). It is not heterosexual coupling that is the motive for the protagonist Mulan anymore, but she ardently desires to fight like a man/as a man, and actually does so.

Now we can see that *Frozen* (2013) is an updated version of this self-critical tradition of princesses. Its double-protagonist scheme is quite an appropriate way to express the postfeminist situation. The story of Anna, who longs for the marriage with "the One" just like the earlier Disney princesses but who is miserably betrayed, is nothing but an ironic criticism of Cinderella stories that Disney itself promoted long ago. On the other hand, Elsa, whose song "Let It Go" vividly expresses a desire for emancipation, could be seen to be someone with a second-wave-feminist drive toward women's liberation, and as someone who has broken through the "glass ceiling" and has realized this liberation through her extraordinary skills in magic.

Nausicaä precedes all of this. But can we say that this is the victory of second-wave feminism? Partly, yes. However, if we can see in the story of Anna the negation of the welfare state regime (which Cinderella stories were all about, after all) and in Elsa a new personality who is recommended in the age which came after the welfare state, shouldn't we suspect that the victory was a partial one?

Indeed, this is precisely what this essay implies by the word postfeminism, and what Nancy Fraser made explicit in her essay "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," by saying that "second-wave feminism has unwittingly provided a key ingredient of the new spirit of neoliberalism" (220). Although Fraser does not use the word postfeminism, what she states here captures the essence of it: that

the “emancipation” which second-wave feminism sought after has been more than compatible with neoliberalism. Second-wavers’ critique of the welfare state (or the family wage, in Fraser’s terminology) was surely directed at the gender injustices inherent in it, but especially after the 1980s, the ideal of collective and political emancipation has been superseded by the practice of individual and economic emancipation. The definition of the word postfeminism, together with that of its relative word third-wave feminism, fluctuates from critic to critic, but certainly Shelley Budgeon shares the same historical view as Fraser when she defines postfeminism as follows:

By asserting that equality has been achieved postfeminist discourse focuses on female achievement, encouraging women to embark on projects of individualized self-definition and privatized self-expression exemplified in the celebration of lifestyle and consumption choices. (281)

This is also what Angela McRobbie finds in popular postfeminist texts like *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, which “re-regulate[s] young women by means of the language of choice” (22).

The postfeminist situation poses two problems. One is, in a manner of speaking, the concealment of labor. As McRobbie and Budgeon state, postfeminist freedom tends to be expressed as freedom as a consumer. In this, postfeminism is backed by, and at the same time promotes, the ideology of “the end of work.”³ This ideology does not claim that any work or labor has vanished; rather, as will be shown in the analyses of Miyazaki’s works later, labor is amply represented in postfeminist texts, albeit in a different way. Nonetheless, certain kinds of material/productive labor which used to be the normative form of labor under the welfare state (or state-managed capitalism in Fraser’s words)—which certainly exist, as we are consuming produced goods,

to be sure—are concealed from our view.

The second problem, which has much to do with the first, is the division among women. Regarding this problem, I would cite the name of Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook and the author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, as a representation of the one side of this division. Can we call her a feminist, as she proudly calls herself (159)? That is one of the most pressing questions that feminism faces in this postfeminist era. Should we regard someone like her, an exceptional individual who has broken through the glass ceiling and realized the ideal of “have-it-all,” as the ideal of feminism? Dawn Foster, in her *Lean Out*, says no. Foster criticizes the kind of feminism Sandberg embodies as “corporate feminism.” According to Foster, corporate feminism “doesn’t extend to calling for collective rights for women such as state maternity pay, or a stronger welfare safety net, or even encouraging women to unionise” (11). It aims to realize women’s liberation not through collective political action but through individual efforts. Thus “[t]here is no room, in the corporate feminist world, for a civil life, a political life, an emotional life outside of the nuclear family unit, or even downtime” (16).

The logic to justify corporate feminism is that of “trickledown feminism.” The wealth and power that a handful of women gain is justified because it is supposed to “trickle down” to other women. But in reality, it does not, because “[a] few more women may be MPs or CEOs, but three times as many young women are locked into low-paid jobs than were 20 years ago” (Foster 20). Class division among women is resurging as a central problem for feminism, and corporate feminism, which affirms this division, is “a story that is convenient to capitalism” (21).

What is “great” about *Frozen* is that this work comes close to representing women’s division through its double protagonists. But of course, *Frozen* does not really represent a working-class woman. Anna,

rather, represents a gender regime whose time is running out: the regime of the welfare state. And thus she functions as a justification for the new gender regime represented by Elsa. Their final reconciliation may render this film the “feminist romance” that Nancy Fraser astutely describes as follows:

Endowing their daily struggles with an ethical meaning, the feminist romance attracts women at both ends of the social spectrum: at one end, the female cadres of the professional middle classes, determined to crack the glass ceiling; at the other end, the female temps, part-timers, low-wage service workers, domestics, sex workers, migrants, EPZ workers, and micro-credit borrowers, seeking not only income and material security, but also dignity, self-betterment, and liberation from traditional authority. At both ends, the dream of women’s liberation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation. Thus, second-wave feminism’s critique of the family wage has enjoyed a perverse afterlife. Once the centerpiece of a radical critique of androcentrism, it serves today to intensify capitalism’s valorization of waged labor. (221)

The reason why the feminist romance attracts women “at both ends” is that it serves as an imaginary solution to the reality of their division. *Nausicaä* and *Star Wars* are both feminist romances in that they implicitly celebrate women at the first end of Fraser’s spectrum, giving women at the latter end a false hope: that some day, their toil will be rewarded and they will be among the ranks of professional middle classes—if not, it’s because their efforts are still not enough. *Frozen* is also a feminist romance in that it provides a false representation of women’s division, thus representing an illusory reconciliation between them. In either case, the labor of the latter women is obliterated from

our view. But it is such housewifized labor, to borrow Maria Mies's words, that is at the core of the current accumulation of capital. Mies states that "housewifization means the externalization, or ex-territorialization of costs which otherwise would have to be covered by the capitalists" and "[t]his means women's labour is considered a natural resource, freely available like air or water" (110).

What we should aim at, then, is looking for such obliterated women's labor in cultural representation, or if we can't, at least criticizing the concealment or misrepresentation of such labor. This will ultimately lead to the real solution of, or at least the first step toward the solution of, the class division of women.

***Kiki's Delivery Service* and Identity Labor**

Two of Miyazaki's works which explicitly deal with the theme of work and labor are *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Spirited Away*, in each of which a young girl is initiated into the world of work. Then, do these films do justice to the reality of women's work? As I have implied, they do not, although certainly they represent certain crucial aspects of the current configuration of labor. In what follows, I will describe the labor represented in *Kiki's Delivery Service* as "post-Fordist identity labor." What is implied by this term is that in the post-Fordist era, it is supposed that it is not one's material productive labor which creates wealth, but one's whole action (including labor) and whole human personality. Paolo Virno is one of the philosophers who tried to give an explanation for this regime of labor. According to Virno, the "tripartition" of Labor, Action, Intellect, which goes back to Aristotle and is rearticulated by Hannah Arendt, has dissolved in the post-Fordist era:

[T]he boundaries between pure intellectual activity, political action, and labor have dissolved. I will maintain, in particular, that the world of so-called post-Fordist labor has absorbed into

itself many of the typical characteristics of political action... (50)

The essential feature of post-Fordism is that it dissolves the boundaries between labor and other human action, or between the time of labor and that of leisure (or of political action, in Virno's case). Labor is no longer a form of alienation, just as leisure is no longer the time to recover one's "true self". In the post-Fordist era, when flexible, on-demand or just-in-time production requires the labor force to be equally flexible (i.e. you should be able to employ or dismiss laborers at will) and when full-time, life-long employment is no longer the norm, leisure, or even the state of unemployment, is not a moment in which you can escape from labor. On the contrary, it is a time to prepare ourselves for the next shift, or the next employment. We are expected to always renew our skills. Not only that: in Nikolas Rose's terms, each of us is expected to be "an entrepreneur of him- or herself," by which he means that "the individual was to conduct his or her life ... as a kind of enterprise, seeking to enhance and capitalize on existence itself through calculated acts and investments" (Rose 164).

To put it otherwise, it is from your whole self, not just from your labor at the workplace, that wealth is supposed to be extracted. As with housewifization, it is from non-waged or half-waged activity that wealth—or surplus value to be more precise—is created. It is one step further from this that we get the ideology in which one's identity itself is considered as the source of capital accumulation. Reiichi Miura defines "identity labor" as follows:

Identity labor is a normative form of labor in the postmodern era (by "postmodern" I mean it conceals conventional forms of labor). It is accounted for and justified in terms of the (postmodern and pseudo-) concept of creative economy as a new model of economy in the developed world. There is no

“production,” but the realization of creativity inherent within us produces “wealth.” It is a manifestation of a utopian wish that self-realization equals wealth. (my trans.; 99)

What Miura has in mind in the last sentence is what is called *yarigai sakushu* in Japanese. *Yarigai* is a very difficult concept to translate, but if a certain job has *yarigai*, it means that the job is quite challenging but is supposed to be worth doing. In this, *yarigai* is strongly connected with one’s self-realization. Put together with the word *sakushu* [exploitation], this phrase captures the essence of the current capitalist accumulation of wealth. It describes how one willingly offers his/her whole self at the service of the capital under the post-Fordist regime.

Creative economy, which is recently being put forward by the UNCTAD,⁴ can be considered as one aspect of post-Fordist capitalism, or as some theorists call it, of cognitive capitalism.⁵ I cannot discuss these ideas in detail here, but it would be worth pointing out that identity labor can be regarded as an important component of these forms of capitalism. And before we go on to discuss *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, we need to introduce another term which can be regarded as roughly coextensive with the concept of identity labor: emotional labor. First formulated by A. R. Hochschild in 1983 in her *The Managed Mind*, this concept has been considered not only to express a new aspect of current labor, but also to constitute a crucial dimension of global capitalism, by thinkers like Hardt and Negri (although in their case the term is affective labor (292-93)). In what follows, we will see how identity labor, or emotional labor, is presented as the normative form of labor in *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, and therefore how this work can be read as a story of *yarigai* exploitation.

Firstly, it is again Reiichi Miura who pointed out that *Kiki’s Delivery Service* is “a story about the privatization of the postal service” and therefore it is a story of neoliberalism (88). It was during the

Koizumi administration of 2001-2006 that the privatization of the postal service in Japan was finally implemented, but we can say that this work, which was released in 1989, already anticipated that. The Japanese title of the work is *Majo no Takkyubin* [*A Witch's Delivery Service*]. *Takkyubin* is not (or at least used not to be) a general noun, but a trademark owned by Yamato Transport, which was a sponsor of this film. Then, *takkyubin*/delivery service was a private enterprise that was to replace the national postal service.

It is not only because of such crude facts that *Kiki's Delivery Service* can be said to belong to the neoliberal era; it is because of the quality of labor that Kiki, as an apprentice witch, performs. As Miura points out, “as long as the story’s moral is that the heroine achieves her self-realization by becoming a skilled courier, the ‘delivery’ in this story can’t be a public and governmental postal service, but it must be a profitable enterprise which can be and is done by an individual’s ingenuity—it must be a creative *takkyubin*” (my trans.; 88-89). Here, I want to elaborate on Miura’s argument and show that Kiki’s labor possesses the quality of identity labor; and above all, that of emotional labor.

Before Kiki’s labor begins, she is cast under some spells, as it were, under which she is doomed to perform post-Fordist emotional labor. One is the very beginning of the story, where Kiki is going to leave her home for her one-year apprenticeship. Kiki’s witch mother, seeing that Kiki is not very happy with the witch’s plain dress, says to her, “What matters is your heart.” And she goes on to add, “Don’t forget your smiles, always” (0:04:16-0:04:27). This addition is all the more important because it didn’t exist in the original novel, but was added in the film version (Kadono 25). This advice is not so much a piece of advice as a prediction, or worse, a curse which continues to bind Kiki throughout the rest of the film. That is to say, in the story to follow, the condition of success for Kiki is not developing her skills, leading a life

in an unfamiliar town, or finding a job and earning money. Rather, she is forced to keep “smiling.” This does not mean that smiling is the key to success; keeping smiling itself *is* the success.

Another “curse” placed upon Kiki is Osono’s words, also in the earlier segment of the film. Osono is a lady at a bakery whom Kiki happens to meet after the difficult first day in the town and who eventually offers her accommodation. After Kiki helps her by delivering a soother to her customer’s baby—which prompts the idea of a delivery service as her profession—and just before she decides to offer her accommodation, Osono says to her, “I like you” (0:23:43). Osono’s casual words are supposed to be very personal and well-meaning, but her words also bind her once and for all: she must be someone “liked” in order to be a successful apprentice. Her words are all the more binding because without Osono’s offer of help, Kiki would not have any place to live, to say nothing of the infrastructure (like a telephone) for her job as a courier. In fact, the success of her job rests upon how much she can cultivate her personal connections (the most successful of which would be the connection with the wealthy old lady who asks Kiki to deliver a herring pie) by means of her communicative and emotional power, and never upon her physical skills as a courier. Thus, although the delivery service may seem to be constituted by material labor, the emphasis falls on the job as emotional or affective labor.

The latter half of the story centers on Kiki’s loss of her ability to fly. Here also, the loss is understood in terms of emotional labor and identity labor. When she has lost her ability, Kiki says to herself (or Jiji, her cat), “Where is Kiki frank and bright?” (1:15:40) Here, the original Japanese for “frank and bright” is a stock phrase “*sunao de akarui*.” “Frank” does not really capture the nuances of the word *sunao*. It can also be translated as “honest,” “true to oneself,” “obedient” or “docile.” And if you know that this stock phrase is usually used to praise children

or younger women, it will be easy to see that there's a strongly gendered connotation in what Kiki says about herself; it also shows how gendered emotional labor in general is. Here, the loss of magical power and the inability to manage her emotions are not understood in terms of cause and effect, but both are at one with each other. Kiki's magical power, which she needs for her delivery service, and being "frank and bright" are the expressions of each other; the loss of magical power *is* the failure in the management of emotion and of identity, and vice versa.

What confirms this correspondence between emotion and skills for work is Ursula, a painter who lives in the woods and who acts as a "donor" in narratological terms. (She doesn't have a name in the film, but here I will call her by the name she is given in the original novel.) After losing her power, Kiki, low in spirit, goes to Ursula's hut in the woods, and an evening's talk with her triggers her later recovery. Interestingly, Ursula clearly equates magic and her ability as an artist, saying, "Magic and painting are similar; sometimes I, too, just can't paint" (1:26:07). Here, magic, which has been equated with emotional labor, is extended and treated as something commensurable with artistic creation. Of course, we should remember here the idea of creative economy discussed above. The image of labor as a creation from inside—magic and emotion are both connected with this.

What brings this vision of identity labor to completion is the discussion regarding the source of magic. Asked by Ursula how magic works, Kiki replies that witches "fly by blood" (1:27:54). Ursula looks very convinced by this and says, "Witches' blood, painters' blood, bakers' blood ..." (1:28:00). Here, Ursula is performing a surprising extension and reversal. I have already explained what the equation of "witches' blood" with "painters' blood" means: what sustains a job is not a material skill but identity (of course, the introduction of "blood" confirms this). But what is the last term, "bakers' blood"? Here we seem to be encountering a grave category mistake. So far, the kind of labor

that *Kiki's Delivery Service* has presented as a normative labor has been identity labor and emotional labor. A baker is a job which is in a stark contrast with this: it is material productive labor, and can be regarded as a typical *Fordist* labor.

The irony about this is that the very baker who appears in the film seems to stand on the completely opposite pole of emotional labor. The baker is the husband of Osono (in the novel he is called Fukuo, but again he is nameless in the film). He is given only three lines, all of which are just exclamations. He looks like an essence of Fordism, in which laborers are supposed to be silent and emotional communication is discouraged.

What is happening when Fukuo is drawn into the list that Ursula draws up? It is what Miura called in the previous quotation the concealment of "conventional forms of labor." Ursula's list presents a worldview in which identity labor covers everything and conventional forms of material labor have disappeared. This film as a whole resorts to a sophisticated strategy of containment in which it represents a Fordist laborer initially, and after that counts him as one of the identity laborers. *Kiki's Delivery Service*, which seems on the surface to be about jobs and labor, is really about the end of work. And in the world where work has ended, identity laborers like Kiki are *yarigai*-exploited.

This theme of the film sees its completion in the last sequence. Kiki regains her flying power in the attempt to rescue her friend Tombo from a stranded airship. How and why does she regain it? The discussion so far suggests that it means she has taken back the control over her identity which she once lost. But then, why? Are there any other answers than her strong wish to rescue Tombo?

Here it is significant that the rescuing of Tombo is represented as a media event within the drama. The rescue is aired on TV, and all the characters and other townspeople watch it and cheer Kiki on of one accord (Plate 3). What happens here, in short, is that Kiki becomes a

TV performer, or an idol. Of course, media events represented within a drama work as an allegory of the relationship between the real audience and the work itself. By representing the audience and the object of its gaze (Kiki), *Kiki's Delivery Service* makes it possible for its viewers to identify with the characters who are watching TV. Such a mechanism emphasizes the fact that Kiki is someone on the screen: that she is an idol (or *aidoru* in Japanese). And what is a TV idol—who literally sells her/his personality itself—if not the embodiment of post-Fordist identity labor? By rendering the climactic event a media event, *Kiki's Delivery Service* finalizes its vision of the world of identity labor.

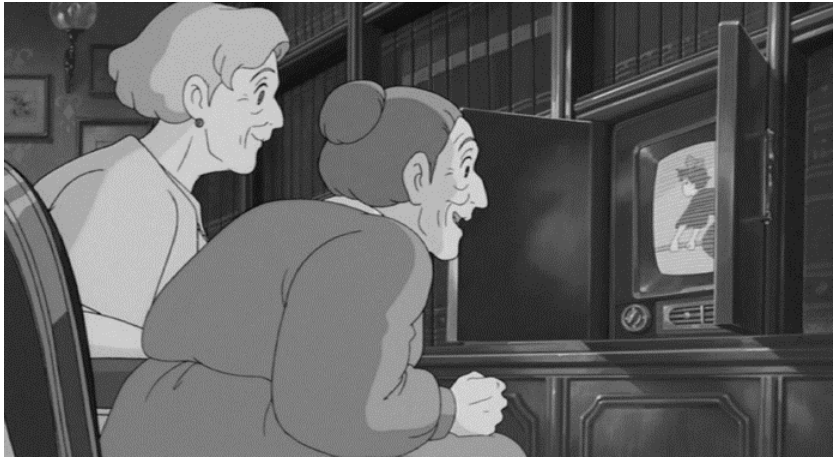


Plate 3

Is *Spirited Away* a Third-Wave Feminist Text?

Chihiro, the protagonist of *Spirited Away* (2001), seems to be fed up with all of this.

From the very beginning of the film, Chihiro, on the back seat of the parents' car with a sullen face, seems as if she wanted to say that she had had enough of the post-Fordist command to be "nice" (Plate 4).

Did Spirited Away Dream of Third-Wave Feminism?

Perhaps it might not have been Miyazaki's intention in *Spirited Away* to criticize the vision of labor he presented in *Kiki's Delivery Service*. We could begin, however, from the proposition that it was. Isn't *Spirited Away* a critique of *Kiki's Delivery Service*? If so, is *Spirited Away* a sort of an attempt in realism, which tries to bring back in representation the conventional labor which was foreclosed in the previous work? In other words, if *Kiki's Delivery Service* is a postfeminist text, can we see *Spirited Away* as a third-wave feminist text which criticizes and tries to go beyond postfeminism?



Plate 4

To be sure, labor in *Spirited Away* seems to point to quite an opposite direction compared with *Kiki's Delivery Service*. This is condensed in the scene where Chihiro is stripped of her name and given a new name Sen by Yubaba, the general manager of the bathhouse in which Chihiro/Sen is to work. If the message here is that you don't need your identity in work, and labor is something in which you are alienated from your "true name," can we say that *Spirited Away* posits post-Fordist material labor as a normative form of labor?

As will be discussed in what follows, *Spirited Away* is a little more complicated than that. Certainly, this work represents a different kind of labor from *Kiki's Delivery Service*, but it will turn out that the kinds of labor represented in both works are supplementary to each other. Let us begin by considering rather straightforwardly what *Yuya*—the bathhouse—symbolizes, and what the features of the labor there look like. There could be many answers, but here I would express the labor performed in *Yuya* in two words: care work—or here I would prefer the phrase care *labor*, to emphasize the pains involved in it. Or if we follow Eva Feder Kittay, what we have in this film can be called dependency work. But it needs to be pointed out that, whereas Kittay chose this expression to differentiate it from other forms of gendered labor (like what she calls affectional labor (30)), *Spirited Away* goes the opposite direction to this; it represents care labor in an essentially undifferentiated way.

First of all, to begin from a literal level, *Yuya* is a bathhouse for gods or spirits, and it offers not only baths but it is a general recreational facility for them. If we look not only at the subjects and symbols but at the texture of images, we start to see layers of images in which dependency work including nursing and care, and affectional labor in which sexuality is involved are condensed and presented at once. One of the most salient episodes is that of a “stink spirit” [*okusare sama*]. The “stink spirit” later turns out to be originally a god of river, but it is mired in sludge and rubbish presumably owing to the pollution by human beings. Chihiro makes use of the vouchers for a medicated bath which Non-Face (a creature which Chihiro has lead inside *Yuya*) has given her, pulls out rubbish from the stink spirit’s body and saves *Yuya* from the crisis. Here we encounter the first instance of a motif which will be repeated in this work: the motif of excretion. Miyazaki is always good at expressing senses of somatic movements, such as flying, hitting, or the dynamic perception of the wind, but what gives the deepest

impression in *Spirited Away* is the sense of excretion. In fact, the scene of the stink spirit's excretion gives viewers, strangely, not a sense of revulsion, but a certain sense of pleasure. However that may be, it is important that excretion is repeated at least twice after that. One is the sequence in which Haku vomits out a magical seal which he had stolen from Zeniba, a twin sister of Yubaba. The other is the episode of Non-Face, in which Non-Face, who has grown into a huge monster after consuming the staff of *Yuya* as well as the enormous amount of food that has been served to him, vomits everything that he has eaten.

What is crucial about both episodes, and about the first episode of the "stink spirit," is that it is none other than Chihiro who takes care of these excretions. It may be already clear that these excretions symbolize, rather literally, dependency work, and to be more precise, aged care (remember that the "stink spirit" turns into a very old man after excreting his sludge).

But that is only one of the layers of meaning. Labor in *Yuya* has at least two more levels of signification, both of which concern another form of excretion. One of them is sex work. The bawdy landscape of *Yuya* and its surroundings clearly remind us of red-light districts of the past in Japan, and if so, another reading is possible: that Chihiro became a sex worker in this wonderland and facilitated another kind of excretion—that is, ejaculation.

This reading, which might invoke the wrath of some of Ghibli fans, is supported by Miyazaki himself:

When I [Miyazaki] was a child, there were districts in Shinjuku where you saw, literally, red lanterns. [*Spirited Away*] depicts intentionally those busy areas of the past, which we have forgotten without noticing.... (Shimizu 70)

In *Spirited Away*, we certainly see affectional labor as waged labor in

an indistinguishable form from aged care.

What if we have another, disquieting level of signification in Chihiro's labor? Chihiro is stripped of her name when she gets a job, as stated above. What is another institution in which women are (in many cases) robbed of their names? Marriage, of course. And again, marriage is (in many cases) an institution of unpaid housework, dependency work, and affectional labor. If that is a viable reading, labor in *Yuya* turns out to be a chaotic amalgam of dependency work, affectional labor, and housework, both paid and unpaid.

To go back to the initial question, is *Spirited Away* a third-wave feminist text, in the sense, as we have seen, that it represents kinds of labor which postfeminist texts foreclose (in this case, gendered dependency work in a broad sense)? The answer is yes and no. In order to evaluate the representations of care/dependency labor in this film, we need to consider the current world of work within which even this work seems to be contained.

Paid Dependency Work, Special Economic Zones, and the Outsourcing of Housework

In spite of what I have been arguing so far, we need some reservations in saying that we can find a radical potential in *Spirited Away*'s dissolution of the division between unpaid and paid work. For, as we have seen, the division between unpaid work (action) and paid work (waged labor) is already deconstructed in the post-Fordist workfare society, in the sense that everything you do is (under-)paid labor.⁶ (Though we should not forget that it is only one "worldview"—more on this later in my conclusion.)

If so, it can be argued that, given the "welfare-to-work" presupposition of this film, the theme of *Spirited Away* is about turning care labor into *paid or waged* labor. And if that is true, it can be argued that this work addresses the contradictions of the postfeminist condition.

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For, if equality has been achieved as the postfeminist worldview claims, then who is going to perform the unpaid housework or care labor which was traditionally done by women? The answer is, of course, by *outsourcing* care labor and transforming it into paid work.

The problem here is that care labor, even if paid, is still gendered, and therefore its price will be beaten down, creating or worsening the gap among women. For instance, in June 2014, the Japanese government passed a cabinet decision called “Japan Revitalization Strategy” which includes a plan of “[a]ccepting housekeeping support workers in National Strategic Special Economic Zones” (Headquarters 26). This is a plan to outsource housekeeping labor to, obviously, other Asian countries, and this is probably part of measures connected to the promotion of “women’s social participation” put forward in the same report (23-24). The problem with this plan is that, under such a pretext, it induces the dumping of paid housekeeping labor, done not only by immigrant workers but by domestic women who cannot benefit from such labor for their own “social participation.” A “Special Economic Zone” is, in this view, nothing but an outpost for labor dumping. This measure is aimed at, or at least has the effect of, lowering the value and quality of care/dependency labor further, which has been gendered and made poor in quality all along.⁷

The danger of reading *Spirited Away* as a kind of *bildungsroman*—as a story of Chihiro learning, through the experience of work, how to live her life—may be obvious if we take a look, for example, at a white paper issued from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan in 2001, which introduces *Spirited Away* as a story in which Chihiro “realize[s] the meaning of ‘doing something for others’ and of ‘giving to others, not being given by others,’ and thereby awakening to the ‘zest for living [*ikiru chikara*]’ long dormant in herself” (Chapter 2; Section 2; 3).⁸ In short, the white paper states that “growth” for Chihiro consists in learning to dedicate

her labor willingly for others: in learning to be an easily exploitable person. And of course, care labor tends to be exploited precisely because it seems to consist in a dedication for others. Thus, *Spirited Away* presents a new ethic of care labor which is to be the basis for the postfeminist regime of labor, and which could be regarded as the other side of *yarigai* exploitation of Kiki.

Lastly, however, I would like to point out an element which deviates from all of this—a contradiction which remains unresolved in this work. This concerns another “dependency work” inscribed in the film: I’m referring to the existence of Boh, a huge baby whom Yubaba cherishes. Even a formidable moneygrubber like Yubaba is quite weak against Boh and she dedicates herself to his care. In the relationship with Boh, Yubaba is a “working mother.” And if we presuppose that she is an ideal figure of a contemporary working mother, as a logical consequence from what I have been arguing, Boh’s care should be “outsourced.” But Yubaba can never escape from it. Why?

Here, we finally see the reason why, as suggested above, the vision of post-Fordist labor is only a vision and a point of view. The existence of Boh suggests that the vision that everything—including care/dependency labor—can be (under-)paid work has its limits. This is shown most clearly in the last sequence of the film. In the last scene in which Chihiro goes back to *Yuya* from the house of Zeniba, Boh’s independence is insinuated. As Zeniba astutely recognizes, Boh has already got himself free from the spell which turned him into a rat-like creature, but he chooses to remain in that figure by his free will. And when he comes back, Yubaba is surprised to see Boh standing on his feet and further shocked by his words against her: “If you make Sen cry, I will hate you” (my trans.; 1:56:18). What does this passing scene of Boh’s independence mean?

We could see in this the theme of growth as we do in Chihiro’s case. True. But in this context, this growth is more appropriately

expressed as Boh's "passing out of the state of dependency." What this paraphrase suggests is, if a free deduction is allowed here, that it is Yubaba who is going to go into the state of dependency next. In this, Yubaba is quite contradicted. For although she is an agent of neoliberal and post-Fordist capitalism as the argument so far may have implied, she is expecting Boh to perform a role that, for example, an only son in a nuclear family under the welfare state regime would have been expected to: taking care of his parents in old age. But Boh's revolt puts her in a crisis. Her crisis can be called, in Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon's words, that of "postindustrial dependency" (101). According to them, "the semantic map of dependency" is redrawn in the postindustrial/post-Fordist age: "Whereas industrial usage had cast some forms of dependency as natural and proper, postindustrial usage figures as avoidable and blameworthy" (99). In the industrial/welfare-state era, some forms of dependency were considered "natural and proper," like being a housewife, a child, a student, or an elderly person. However, in the postindustrial/post-Fordist age, which is at the same time the age of the "workfare" society and the age when independence is "identified with wage labor" (100) and such a self-supporting figure of "the worker tends to become the universal social subject" (101), the stigma of dependency is increased and is attached more widely to those subjects who were not regarded as dependent in the previous era. Moreover, such dependency is considered not as structural and social, but as the result of individual faults. "Postindustrial dependency ... is increasingly individualized" (101). Yubaba faces this. She is denied her old age when she will be dependent on Boh in a "natural and proper" way. Perhaps the only way for Yubaba to solve this crisis is to earn more money and outsource the care labor needed when she retires and she herself becomes a dependent. But that doesn't explain Yubaba's love and indulgence of Boh. Yubaba's love of Boh may be, finally, a denial of the contradictions upon which the world of *Spirited Away* is

constructed. What Yubaba's crisis points to is the existence of problems that outsourcing (and dumping) of care labor does not solve, and the existence of the exploitation of care labor that this work as a whole tries to conceal.

In closing, I want to emphasize that Yubaba's crisis is also ours; that is, it is a general human condition. We are born into a state of dependency, go back to more or less the same state, and die. The transformation of dependency labor into paid work means that as such, life as a whole is commodified, yet in this last scene we see Yubaba, who is a capitalist and an agent of commodification herself, return to a naked human (if she was a human at all). Just after Boh's revolt, Chihiro calls to Yubaba "Grandma" and she is surprised at that. Chihiro's appellation, by addressing a human and dependent entity "Grandma," reveals Yubaba's crisis and her predicament, at the very same time as it saves her from it by suggesting that there could still be labor that cannot be commodified and there can still be room for her to be a "natural and proper" dependant. A story of growth and independence can also be a story of the future dependency of someone who was once a carer. If such a cycle can be called a "society," then the tunnel through which Chihiro went at the beginning and end of the film may be read as a tunnel leading to such a society.

Notes

1. This essay is based on my essay in Japanese, "*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* ha Daisann-pa Feminism no Yume wo Mita ka?: Identity Roudou kara Care Roudou he [Did *Spirited Away* Dream of Third-Wave Feminism?: From Identity Labor to Care Labor]" in *POSSE*, vol. 25, pp. 189-205. Substantial changes and additions have been made.
2. See Dowling and Wakakuwa.

3. For the earliest literature to endorse this ideology, see Bell. See also Rifkin.
4. See the following UNCTAD website: <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DITC/CreativeEconomy/Creative-Economy-Programme.aspx>. Also see *Creative Economy Report 2010* by the UNCTAD. For the earliest ideological formulation of the idea of creative economy (or creative class), see Florida.
5. See Moulier-Boutong for the first book-length formulation of the concept. For the relationship between post-Fordism and knowledge economy, see Marazzi.
6. For the use of the word workfare, see Rose. The new idea of workfare has much to do with what I have argued as identity labor, as “[t]he shift ‘from welfare to workfare’ is linked to a cluster of ideas with a nineteenth-century puritan heritage, but given a new ethical gloss: paid work engenders pride and self-respect, or self-esteem, and ties the individual into respectability, identity and community” and thus poverty is no longer a question of an inequality among social classes, but of ethical nonconformity (266). Rose also points out that the idea of welfare-to-work produced “a sector of labouring population that is casualized, underprotected against risk, insecure and desocialized” (267). Kathi Weeks calls this in her book, which also gives some insights into what I have discussed as identity labor, “the work society” (5-8).
7. The Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center and the Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan have issued a statement against the government’s plan. For the appalling working condition of Asian migrant housekeepers, see Ong, especially chapter 9.
8. “*Ikiru Chikara* [Zest for Living]” has been the general mantra for the national curriculum in Japan. This phrase first appeared in a 1996 report of the Central Council for Education (http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chuuou/toushin/960701.htm), and on

this principle, “general studies” has been incorporated in the national curriculum since around 2000.

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