

Title: From the Age of Robots to the Age of Clones: Unwholesome Copies in Karel Capek's *RUR* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*
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While fantasies of reproducing life mechanically have existed since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in recent years literature and film exploring the subject of nontraditional reproduction reflects a fundamental shift in our understanding of technology and our relationship to it. Comparing the the ur-modernist depiction of robots, made of protoplasmic material in Karel Capek's *RUR* (1921) with the depiction of clones in the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), my paper argues that a change has occurred in our perception of the danger associated with technological innovations and specifically with our practices of recreating life technologically.

Both works portray dangers of technological reproduction and can be regarded as philosophical cautionary tales against scientific/technological positivism, but their set of anxieties are fundamentally at odds. It is telling that in Capek humanity is placed in the position of a victim, while in Ishiguro, it is clones who suffer at the hands of threatening humanity. This reorientation of the direction of victimization exposes the difference in our relation to technologies. Our concern with losing control over technologies we create has mutated into certitude that human beings are free and capable to transform life in accordance with their designs. This position of absolute freedom brings forth ethical concerns; the absence of external barriers necessitates our erection of internal prohibitions. Capek's worry had to do with taking on, and being crushed under, the impossible burden; Ishiguro exposes our moral disquietude at having such indefinite, enormous power at our disposal. My paper attempts to treat the novels as symptomatic of larger cultural trends, specifically the radical shift in the object of our fears associated with technology, from the worry that our freedom and agency are illusory, to the concern that our pursuit of freedom that technological progress exemplifies is fundamentally unethical.

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