The Labor of Cute:
Net Idols, Cute Culture, and the Digital Economy in Contemporary Japan

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Ebihara Yuri, an uncontested epitome of "cute" in Japan,[1] made a thought-provoking connection between cute and labor when she claimed, "If some-one doesn't find me cute, I want to know why because then I'll work on it to get better at being cute."[2] The ability to cultivate cute looks and per-form cute behaviors was key to the success of "net idols"—young women who earned fame in the late 1990s and early 2000s by creating personal websites that featured their photos and diaries. According to a veteran net idol, young women embark on this career in search of meaning in their lives; however, they quickly find themselves performing unpaid work in the digital economy. To identify their strengths, net idols need an audience that the random postings of photos and irregular updates of diaries do not earn them. In the net idol universe, building a fan base is a matter of hard work, of labor invested in producing an appealing performance of cute and in cul-

tivating personal relationships with fans. However, maintaining a successful site is seldom the ultimate goal of a net idol. Instead, young women use these sites to search for meaningful ways to project themselves into the future. Most net idols invest labor into maintaining their websites hoping that they will eventually earn an income from their labor. They shut down their sites when they succeed (or realize that they will not succeed) in achieving this goal. At the same time, while young women turn to the digital economy in search of opportunities to earn an income, this economy mobilizes them to regimes of unpaid and underpaid labor that, in turn, it harnesses as a motor of its own development.

Drawing on my interviews with net idols and my analysis of the digital infrastructure that evolved around the trend, I develop the following arguments in this essay.[3] I claim that the digital economy has adopted a particular mode of accumulation the Italian autonomists theorized as the *social factory*—a mode of accumulation that expands sources of value extraction by strategically destabilizing the separation between paid/productive and unpaid/reproductive labor.[4] In Japan, the digital economy evolved in the aftermath of a long recession that has unhinged processes of capital accumulation from practices of social reproduction while pushing the latter into a relentless crisis. As such, the rapid growth of the digital economy was an effect of this economy's success in tapping the escalating care deficit in the 2000s. Second, drawing on the premise that net idols built their careers by performing emotional labor for which they were not compensated financially, I argue that the digital economy has effectively expanded beyond the domestic sphere the practices through which value is extracted from women's unpaid labor. Lastly, I demonstrate that young women did not uncritically accept their mobilization to regimes of unpaid emotional labor. Rather, they used digital media to create forms of work that were both lucrative and rewarding. More specifically, the net idols sought to transform their unpaid emotional labor (the investment of emotions in service and care work) into paid affective labor (the investment of subjectivity as the raw material of valorization).[5]

To develop my arguments, I divide the essay into three sections. In the first section, I analyze the emergence of the net idol phenomenon as a script that reveals how the digital economy has emerged as a specific appara-

tus of the social factory. I use the notion of the social factory to capture a shift in the mode of production away from generating value from paid labor toward extracting value from a strategic destabilization of the boundary between productive/paid labor and reproductive/unpaid labor, including skill development.[6] Put differently, I understand the social factory as a mode of production that expands sources of value extraction by integrating processes of capital accumulation, practices of social reproduction, and the development of human capital within a single circuit of valorization. By promoting what Paolo Virno calls the "ideology of the possible,"[7] the digital economy encourages individuals to invest unpaid emotional labor in order to develop work opportunities that are more conducive to their projects of self-actualization. As such, the digital economy generalizes the idea that unpaid labor is a necessary prerequisite to find meaningful paid work.

In the second section, I continue exploring how the digital economy transforms practices of social reproduction into sources of value extraction. Here, I argue that the development of net idol careers—to which the production of cuteness was central—required the investment of unpaid emotional labor. Originally a subculture produced and maintained by young women in the late 1970s, cute culture had grown into a multitrillion yen business by the 1990s. Scholars have interpreted young women's participation in the production of cute as a form of resistance to a work-oriented adult society and as a retreat to childhood—a space within which mainly young women find redemption by indulging in infantile play and passive behavior.[8] By contrast, I propose that we consider the production of cute in the realm of work, not play. Net idols appeal to their fans—predominantly male irregular workers—by adopting cute looks and behaviors. In real life, men with irregular jobs are not as attractive to women as men who enjoy job security. Net idols, however, do not distinguish between their fans. They help each and every one of their male fans feel good about himself. In exchange, fans help net idols develop themselves into brands that net idols can potentially invest as capital in other forms of enterprise.

In the last section, I argue that the digital economy diffused sources of value extraction throughout the fabric of society by integrating human capital development into its apparatus of value extraction. By promoting the ideology of the possible, the digital economy embraces the idea that all activi-

ties an individual engages in are opportunities to learn new skills. In Japan of the 2000s, this approach to human capital development served a volatile economy's demand for workers willing to relentlessly improve their employability, even though they could only speculate what skills would yield return on investment. In this section, I describe the career of a net idol, Nakamura Toyomi, to demonstrate that young women pursued unpaid emotional labor in the digital economy, hoping that their labor would eventually earn them a dependable income from rewarding affective labor. As Toyomi developed her career, she experimented with various activities, most of which failed to evolve into a source of stable income. After several unsuccessful experiments, however, she did succeed in developing a form of enterprise—which she calls photo-therapy—that made her evenings and weekends so busy around 2010 that she started thinking about quitting her full-time job.

Although the majority of net idols were not as persistent as Toyomi, her example illustrates how young women insisted on using digital media to find work they saw as a source of fulfillment when economic volatility has narrowed their chances for such employment.[9] The net idols offer an important counterpoint to scholarly analyses that ask how to revive hope among young people who feel betrayed in the wake of a long recession, during which they were marginalized from systems of job security and struggled to create forward-moving life projects.[10] The net idols I interviewed did not conform to this portrait. Quite the contrary, they were busy trying to make a new logic of accumulation—the social factory—work for them. The net idol phenomenon, therefore, reveals a sense of nostalgia plaguing scholarship on youth and work in Japan. This scholarship tends to reify a rupture between the era of normative developmentalism and the recessionary period. Resonating with Michael Fisch's article in this issue, which explores the continuity between the Fordist and post-Fordist labor regimes, my analysis of the net idol trend illuminates a continuity rather than a disconnect between these periods. Specifically, I demonstrate that similar to the ways in which women's unwaged labor in the home was instrumental to maintaining the developmental model of the high-growth period, women's free labor remains central to a society in which growing labor precarity and pervasive uncertainty about national and personal futures generate an ever-growing demand for emotional labor.

The Net Idol Phenomenon: Value Extraction in the Social Factory

According to a pioneer net idol I interviewed, young women did not embark on the career of a net idol to take on more work. However, they quickly realized that success in the net idol universe was contingent on hard work. This section examines how the digital economy operates as a distinctive apparatus of the social factory. It does so by tracing how an activity meant to be redemptive was transformed into unpaid and often stressful emotional labor. Mario Tronti defines the social factory as follows: "At the highest level of capitalist development social relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society."[11] To trace how the social factory incorporates young women in a regime of unpaid emotional labor, I reconstruct the evolution of the net idol phenomenon. In particular, I focus on the following two questions: (1) What were the most common aspirations that motivated young women to become net idols? and (2) How did the digital media economy enable and disable the possibilities for young women to fulfill their goals? I conclude this section by claiming that the digital economy succeeded in mobilizing women to perform unpaid emotional labor by promising them the possibility of lucrative and meaningful affective labor.

Although the majority of net idols are female students or office ladies between the ages of sixteen and twenty-eight, I also corresponded with net idols who identified as homemakers.[12] For example, one homemaker told me that she created her website to fight what she perceived as a loss of purpose in her life after she quit her job. She noted that her husband supported her net life, since he could follow her daily activities while being away from her. Another homemaker/net idol shared a similar view. She reasoned that housewives become net idols to fight what they experience as a crisis of identity. She explained as follows: "Housewives have a good reason to become net idols. The work of a housewife is devalued, and young housewives often lose sight of what their purpose in life is. I would say I even lost my sense of self [*jibun wo miushinatteita'n desu*]. The media talk a lot about housewives who become 'kitchen drinkers' or who cheat on their husbands. Unlike them, I am not a self-destructive personality, so I became a net idol."

Some net idols, however, took the desire for self-healing to an extreme, as evidenced in 2006 by the much-publicized cases of two net idols, Hirata Erika and Nanjo Aya. Hirata used her diary to describe how she was able to overcome her sense of despair, which she found "suffocating," by setting fire to buildings and watching them burn to ashes. Similarly, Nanjo Aya, who hoped that her net idol career would help her defeat her anxiety disorder, terminated her life in front of her webcam.

In their accounts of what they initially sought in their net idol careers, my informants primarily cited such reasons as self-exploration (*jibun sagashi*), self-realization (*jiko jitsugen*), and fun (*asobi*). At the outset, it is important to highlight that it took considerable courage for young women to become net idols. My informants emphasized that the popular media relentlessly berated net idols for their "exhibitionism." This is curious, given that, in the context of a net idol career, "exhibitionism" is part and parcel of the self-realization and self-valorization that the digital economy encouraged young women to pursue. Further, the long hours young women invested in building their net idol careers also lend support to the claim that women brought aspirations to this career far beyond the mere desire to have fun. A net idol stated the following:

> Initially, I created my website to have fun. I understood that the figure indicating how many people accessed my websites did not equal what I was worth as a human being. However, I did not want to lose to other net idols. I received thirty e-mails per day and responded to all of them. When I nominated myself for a net idol contest, I spent countless hours writing e-mails to my fans asking them to vote for me. While being a net idol, I felt like I was doing some type of service work. It was just an awful lot of work.[13]

Correspondingly, observers have highlighted the demanding nature of mastering the writing styles characteristic of web-based diaries and the photographic conventions net idols had to adopt if they wanted to succeed in the net idol universe. Muramatsu Takahide points out that an extremely high percentage of women gave up this career shortly after embarking on it.[14]

The net idol trend took off while the infrastructure of the digital media economy was still evolving. It was not until 1999 that broadband Internet

service began replacing dial-up service. Although Japan's "second telecom deregulation" took place in 1999,[15] it took another two years for the quality of Internet services to begin to improve and for the cost of the service to significantly decrease.[16] The technical difficulties the first generation of net idols (1998–2000) encountered in creating their websites attest to the determination (and, in some cases, desperation) of these young women. Before 1999, creating a web page required purchasing web-page-building software, and the process of developing a web page was time consuming.[17] It was not until 2000 that free services to create websites such as www.geocities.co.jp, www.freeweb.ne.jp/, and members.goo.ne.jp/ became available.[18] These services, which enabled individuals with limited knowledge of web design to create their own web pages, made net idol sites more consumer friendly by standardizing them.[19] As such, these portals have played a key role in transforming the net idol trend from a subcultural activity to a mainstream practice. Lastly, by generating content-specific communities, these portals have also expanded the net idol market. The congregation of net idols around these content-specific communities offered fans convenient access to net idol sites and allowed them to compare net idols.

In the early 2000s, as more and more women became net idols, an industry began to evolve around the trend that included web portals, net idol ranking sites, net idol academies, and even net idol agents.[20] This industry has begun molding net idols into service providers and their fans into a new niche market. The net idols I interviewed told me that their fans were mainly otaku (geeky men) and male freeters (precarious workers). The appeal of net idols lay in their availability to communicate with their fans. By feeding their fans' belief that the feeling of intimacy between fans and net idols was mutual, the net idols boosted their fans' egos. (Note that fans did not pay net idols for their emotional labor. In exchange for the personal attention fans have received from net idols, fans helped net idols to build their net idol careers.) As such, the emotional labor the net idols performed sustained their fans in their everyday lives. Indeed, when a net idol stopped responding to a fan's e-mails, that fan moved on to another net idol. One informant called this trend the "my idol only" (*boku dake no aidoru*) trend. Of course, the fans of net idols were not exclusively men. Comments posted on net idol sites suggest that net idols also had female fans. Some of these

female fans derived pleasure from following the careers of entrepreneurial women, while others enjoyed seeing "larger-than-life" women who had the courage to continue cultivating youthful forms of femininity that mature (and married) women were supposed to leave behind.

The designers of web portals that targeted net idols and their fans have identified the demand for care and the desire to socialize as the main reasons that attract young people to the Internet. Accordingly, the designers primarily invested in developing bulletin board systems (BBS) that facilitated communication among Internet users. As opposed to investing in developing applications that would have made it more convenient for net idols to post their diaries and photos, the designers of these web portals continued improving the communication systems of these portals. As such, these portals encouraged young women to develop their net idol careers via communicating with their fans. Some developers even experimented with systems that would charge fans for chatting with net idols online. Others tried to incorporate the net idol trend into the burgeoning sex chat business. Eventually, these efforts all failed. An important point to stress is that these portals foreclosed opportunities for self-exploration and skill development by limiting data storage space (initially, up to fifty megabytes) and by prohibiting the pursuit of commercial activities. In other words, the architecture of these portals was designed to mobilize net idols into a regime of unpaid emotional labor.

The portal named "Search for the Net Idol" exemplifies this tendency.[21] This site—aimed to derive revenue from advertising placed on the site— offered a system for ranking net idols according to votes gathered from fans through e-mails; the site gave weekly announcements of the results. Net idols spent countless hours e-mailing their fans and encouraging them to vote for them, which activity required emotional labor. At the same time, an informant told me that it was once common practice among the net idols to create alliances among themselves by generating links to one another's web pages. Ranking sites, however, pitted net idols against each other. These sites refined and hegemonized a set of criteria and practices that net idols could not avoid adopting if they wanted to succeed in the net idol universe. Similarly, several photo books that featured the most popular net idols were pub-

lished between 1999 and 2001. The competition among net idols to appear in one of these printed photo books served a comparable function.[22]

Databases, such as the Net Idols Information Guide site,[23] further hailed net idols as service providers—more specifically, entertainers—by classifying them according to categories that reflected their strengths in such areas of entertainment as photography, diaries/blogs, or music.[24] These sites also strived to earn revenue from advertising. Lastly, one online net idol academy makes it crystal clear in its mission statement that a net idol's principal goal is to entertain fans.[25] The mission statement claims that net idols should pursue the kinds of beauty and cuteness that men, not women, appreciate. Further, it explains that a young woman is not recognized as a net idol unless her site attracts at least a thousand hits per day and she appears in magazines and printed photo albums. If women wish to become net idols, they should master the art of cute and develop unique skills of entertainment indispensable for attracting followers. The mission statement also asserts that this career is only for women whose appearance is above average. These portals make it clear that the net idol career is a service career—and one that requires a heavy investment of emotional labor at that.

Although the aspiration among net idols to earn an income from this career was pervasive, the digital economy predominantly mobilized the net idols to unpaid emotional labor. I highlight that most women did not earn a dependable income from this career. The digital economy has embraced what Paolo Virno called the ideology of the possible—"a sense of being constantly confronted with a phantasmagoric ensemble of simultaneous opportunities."[26] In the 2000s, successful digital media entrepreneurs, including Horie Takafumi (livedoor), Namba Tomoko (DeNa), Nishimura Hiroyuki (2channeru), Mikitani Hiroshi (rakuten), and Kasahara Kenji (mixi), have frequently appeared in the media and have been celebrated as the forerunners of a new era. They became symbols representing the bottomless opportunities in the digital economy to generate wealth and create alternative venues for upward social mobility. In reality, however, opportunities for lucrative and fulfilling work were scarce, and the architecture of the digital economy evolved in a way that it locked individuals—especially women—in a regime of unpaid emotional labor. In the next section, I trace

how the digital economy has encouraged young women to invest emotional labor into producing cute by making the possibility of earning an income from affective labor contingent upon it.

The Production of Cute and Social Reproduction in the Social Factory

Cute culture was originally a subculture created and maintained by young women. By the mid-1990s, however, manufacturers of mass commodities had appropriated cute culture and saturated households with goods sporting cute designs. The massive production of cute commodities had propelled the aesthetic of cute into a position of unchallenged dominance, leading to such peculiarities as police boxes redesigned as gingerbread houses and cute characters appearing in such unexpected places as roadwork signs or delivery trucks.[27] Sharon Kinsella interpreted the culture of cute as a form of simultaneous escapism from and resistance to adult society. She states the following:

> Cute style is antisocial; it idolizes the pre-social. By immersion in the pre-social world, otherwise known as childhood, cute fashion blithely ignores or outright contradicts values central to the organization of Japanese society and the maintenance of the work ethic. By acting childish, Japanese youth try to avoid the conservatives' moral demand that they exercise self-discipline [*enryō*] and responsibility [*sekinin*] and tolerate [*gaman*] severe conditions [*kurō*, *kudō*] whilst working hard [*doryoku*] in order to repay their obligations [*giri*, *on*] to society. Rather than working hard, cuties seem to just want to play and ignore the rest of society completely.[28]

By contrast, the net idol phenomenon suggests that the production of cute is not only a form of play; it is also a form of labor. The net idols reveal that the digital economy extracts value from cute by creating a digital infrastructure within which the production of cute requires young women to perform emotional labor.

Success in the net idol universe is contingent on adopting cute behavior. By acting cute, net idols induce feelings of ease, comfort, and pleasure. In other words, by acting cute, net idols perform emotional labor. Arlie Hochschild defines emotional labor as a type of labor that "requires one to induce

or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others."[29] It is "the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality."[30] I argue that by performing cute (i.e., emotional labor), net idols sustain male irregular workers in their everyday lives. To develop this argument, I first challenge the assumption that cute connotes a particular physical appearance or behavior that a stable set of signifiers can describe. Instead, I stress that semantic flexibility is a central feature of the notion of cute. I claim that it was precisely this semantic flexibility inherent in the notion of cute that allowed net idols to generate their own unique versions of cute and specific styles of emotional labor.

Yomota Inuhiko has argued that while *cute* in English denotes something childish, in contemporary Japan, *cute* (*kawaii*) can describe practically anything ranging from animals to people to machines. He emphasizes that kawaii does not have antonyms. An unattractive person or a grotesque object can simultaneously be cute.[31] Ōtsuka Eiji notes that female high school students described even the dying Showa emperor, Hirohito, as cute, essentially because he looked so vulnerable.[32] Koga Reiko agrees that *kawaii* is a magical word because it can designate almost anything that is round, weak, bright, small, smooth, warm, or soft.[33] For example, strawberries are cuter than apples. That observers routinely contradict each other when they attempt to distill a generic definition of the concept testifies to the semantic flexibility of *kawaii*. While male critics interpret cute as a plea for protection and a desire to be controlled,[34] female critics read women's engagement in the production of cute as a story of women's empowerment.[35] Koga asserts that young women in the 1990s used the word *kawaii* to exercise their power to make value judgments.[36] In other words, they drew on cute culture to express their growing power as trendsetters.

Net idols performed cute behaviors by embracing personality traits such as approachable, gentle, soft, and even submissive. Ueno Chizuko points out that it is the mastery of a highly ritualistic behavior that makes cute performance successful. Ueno notes that cute can be performed by slightly tilting one's head; bending a part of one's body, such as the knee; or cringing one's body to express willingness to submit, just like dogs cringe their bodies to

acknowledge their inferior position to their masters. Ueno likens the perfor-mance of cute to kabuki performances in which men perform as women by using particular *kata* (body postures) to look feminine.[37] Ebihara Yuri, the most popular icon of cute in the 2000s to whom I referred in the beginning of this essay, showcases the performative nature of cute. Her fans agree that Ebihara is cute because she appears approachable. Ebihara, who generates this impression by "always making it a point to smile,"[38] has created her own approachable cute style that the media have discussed as "*ebi-kawaii*." Fans emphasize that they adopt ebi-kawaii to make them feel good about themselves and to please their friends. In other words, they perform cute as a way to care for themselves and for their friends.

Similar to Ebihara, net idols have capitalized on the semantic flexibility of cute to create their own versions of cute and styles of emotional labor. By producing different types of cute, net idols cater to different types of needs. For example, in creating her cute style, Tanaka Eris has consciously dis-tanced herself from net idols who perceive sexiness as the key to becoming successful in the net idol universe. She started writing poems during her net idol career and has published two volumes of poetry. In 2009, Eris told me that she maintained her net idol site only to promote herself as a poet (however, she also told me that she made her living by working for her family's business). On her website, which she entitled "Eris in Wonderland," she presents herself as a mysterious cute girl who likens herself to Alice (in Wonderland) and who "weaves cyber dreams in the ecological system of words and images."[39] Eris employs the staple components of mainstream cute iconography: schoolgirl uniforms, bunny costumes, and innocent but curious eyes indicative of the desire to learn more about her fans. Her por-traits depict a young woman who embraces vulnerability as if to suggest her capacity for empathy. Her fans confirm that Eris is inordinately cute: she is "like anime come to life";[40] it is precisely her cuteness that Eris wants her fans to appreciate. When fans misunderstand her intentions, she furiously insists, "I am not a sexual toy for you guys. I manage my own career as an idol and maintain my own homepage. I have my own desire, a desire to communicate with you, to be seen by you, and to be appreciated."[41]

While Eris's selling point is empathy, Nakamura Toyomi encourages her fans to pursue projects of self-actualization (fig. 1). While Eris promises to

Figure 1 Nakamura Toyomi's web page. Photograph courtesy Nakamura Toyomi

be a soul mate (she sells her sensitivity), Toyomi offers to be a role model (she sells her courage to conquer uncharted terrain). Eris's abstract struggle for perfection is an exaggeration of the will to improve one's self. Toyomi, on the other hand, stresses the importance of the will not so much as a way to survive but rather as a tool to succeed. While Eris listens, Toyomi encourages her fans to get the best out of themselves. Many of Toyomi's photos portray her naked or donning flirty lingerie. She suggests that self-exploration (and, by extension, self-improvement) should not have limits (fig. 2). She does not construct herself as an object of desire; instead she presents herself as a desiring subject. Her photos depict her as either having or looking forward to having pleasure: enjoying dessert concoctions, stroking her body with flowers, or awaiting a lover in a hotel room. The point, however, is not to

Figure 2 Nakamura Toyomi. Photograph courtesy Nakamura Toyomi.

appeal to fans via superfluous sensuality. Rather, Toyomi encourages her fans to not only embark on the path of self-exploration and self-development but also to be bold in this endeavor. Her cute style makes sensuality a main focus, yet it also embodies a performance with no obvious connection to the real person behind the idol. Sensuality and cute are militantly absent in Toyomi's diary. Her diary, entitled "It's Hard to Be a Beauty" (Bijin wa tsurai yo),[42] is a story of self-growth.

Italian autonomists, such as Mario Tronti and Paolo Virno, used the concept of the social factory to stress that traditional spaces of value production, including the factory and the office, no longer serve as the principal sites of value extraction.[43] They interpreted the emergence of the social factory as a consequence of technological developments that have effectively diffused practices of value production beyond the walls of factories and offices. Tronti and Virno conceptualized the social factory as a value-extracting

mechanism characteristic of post-Fordist accumulation. Feminist autonomists, however, have critiqued this conceptualization by tracing the evolution of the social factory back to the Fordist system of production. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James claim that Fordist accumulation was contingent on women's unwaged reproductive work, which was indispensable to the regeneration and maintenance of the dominantly male work force laboring in the factory system.[44] In other words, they argued, the Fordist system was built on integrating within a single circuit of production the realms of productive/paid work and reproductive/unpaid work.

The gendered division of labor that Dalla Costa and James conceptualized as a characteristic feature of Fordist accumulation—within which women are dominantly engaged in unwaged reproductive (i.e., emotional) labor—was a key pillar of the developmental state in postwar Japan. This particular division of labor played an important role in naturalizing the place of women in regimes of work in which women's labor was not recognized as productive and was not compensated with wage. The intimate link between women and unwaged work in postwar Japan is an essential factor to explain why the digital economy was able to so seamlessly mobilize young women, such as the net idols, for unpaid emotional labor and to expand practices of extracting value from women's unwaged labor beyond the domestic sphere. In this vein, the net idol trend reveals that young people utilized digital media to develop new practices of care that were based on the principle of mutuality as opposed to that of dependency.[45] The trend also illustrates that the architects of the digital economy were quick to exploit these emerging practices of care and emotional labor as new sources of profit.

Not surprisingly, many net idols responded with frustration (and sometimes rage) to the demand that they perform cute and, by extension, uncompensated emotional labor. For example, the title poem of Tanaka Eris's first poem collection, *Cute Holocaust*, describes Eris's desire to destroy her own youthful beauty. Eris writes, "I want to pull out my hair. I want to carve out my pores. I want to tear up my blood vessels. I want to gorge myself with lipsticks. I want to grow white hair. I want to let my teeth rot. I want to string a rosary from parakeets' eyes." The last sentence is particularly evocative because it suggests that healing comes from the destruction of cute. Eris concludes her desire to destroy her own cuteness by destroying what

serves as a source of healing to her—parakeets. (Parakeets stand as quintessential epitomes of cute in Eris's poetry.) By eradicating her own cute, she denies visual pleasure and, by extension, healing to others. She concludes her act of self-destruction by appropriating the means of visual pleasure—the eye—and recodes it as a potential means of healing. She asks what is remedial in the production of cute and for whom exactly.

Nakamura Toyomi, on the other hand, not only posts cute pictures on her website but also shows photos that portray her as a doll mutilated into body parts. Toyomi told me that she thought of the digital camera as a technology of healing. Although her brand of cute explores the interface between cute and sensuality, Toyomi does not uncritically embrace sensuality but instead experiments with it. She uses photography to highlight the constructed nature of sensuality. Many of her photos show her body parts disconnected from one another or broken up into ever-smaller segments of skin surface. Toyomi creatively plays with canonical representations of cuteness to show that the presumed innocence and vulnerability that the conventional representations of cuteness impart are only effects of technologically mediated performances.

Human Capital Development in the Social Factory

A tutorial entitled *Netto aidoru no narikata, yarikata, kasegikata* (*How to Become a Net Idol, How to Become Successful, and How to Make Money*) reflects the pervasive aspiration among net idols to earn an income from this career.[46] It offers a step-by-step guide for creating a fan base, and it describes numerous venues through which net idols can earn an income. Examples include meet-and-greet events with fans, such as handshaking (*akushukai*) and photo sessions (*satsueikai*) at which net idols can charge a US$20–$30 entrance fee per person. The author of the tutorial, Umemiya Takako, also suggests that net idols can produce CDs featuring karaoke-style performances, DVDs showing their visiting a shrine or playing with a cute puppy, and digital photo books, all of which they can offer for sale on their websites. She recommends that net idols try their hand at other business opportunities, such as opening retail businesses through net idol sites. She encourages net idols to sell postcards, calendars, fans, balloons, stickers,

and T-shirts with their images printed on them on their websites. Umemiya offers the example of her net idol friend, who developed a small retail business by asking her fans to donate computer parts and digital cameras to her. She recommends that net idols develop their careers into other forms of service work that include working as tour guides, models, and hosts at various debut events. Finally, Umemiya proposes that net idols develop various genres of counseling and healing services.

In fact, it is important to highlight that the net idol trend evolved in the wake of the healing (*iyashi*) boom. In the midst of a nagging recession, a new demand emerged for care and healing practices that did not require considerable time investment and did not put a heavy strain on the individual's savings. During the second half of the 1990s, the market in goods, entertainment, and services that generated soothing effects exploded. Along with pharmaceutical companies, which significantly broadened their lines of health-enhancing products, the culture industries began focusing on the creation of entertainment with soothing effects. Their products ranged from calming music and comforting video games to celebrity figures molded into what became dubbed as *iyashi-kei tarento* (a healing type of celebrity). The emergence of the notion of iyashi-kei itself goes back to the fall of 1994 when an actress named Iijima Naoko appeared in a television commercial for a Georgia brand of canned coffee. She was not only cute, but she also spoke softly and appeared kind and caring to the viewer.[47] The appeal of net idols, like that of Iijima, lay in their willingness to serve as a source of comfort (*yasuragi*) and healing (*iyashi*).

The growing care deficit in the context of a prolonged economic recession presented new opportunities to net idols to earn an income. Net idols, however, were not successful in marketizing emotional labor. While the development of net idol careers was contingent on the investment of uncompensated emotional labor, very few net idols have succeeded in transforming this emotional labor into lucrative affective labor. I define affective labor as a form of labor that requires the investment of subjectivity—life experiences, memories, intimate beliefs, ethics, affective commitments, and political sensibilities— as the raw material of valorization.[48] The digital economy, built on an innovation-driven growth model, urged individuals to utilize opportunities outside the realms of education and formal training to develop new skills.

The digital economy promoted a new approach to human capital development by suggesting that every experience could potentially contribute to increasing an individual's human capital. Since the relationship between individuals and their human capital was speculative, individuals were expected not so much to maximize return on their investment but rather to continue increasing the stock value of their human capital.[49] Affective labor was appealing to young people not only because it allowed them to project themselves into the future but also because this form of labor enabled them to integrate processes of valorization with practices of human capital development.

Although most net idols did not succeed in transforming their net idol careers into lucrative professional opportunities, there are exceptions. Inui Yoko, for instance, transformed her hobby, costume play, into an income-earning opportunity.[50] She produces digital photo albums that she sells through her website, and she also makes money from hosting debut events. Other net idols used their net idol careers as launching pads to pursue careers as models, singers, scriptwriters, illustrators, photographers, or adult video stars.[51] The tendency of net idols to develop their net idol careers while trying their hands at various work opportunities illuminates the ways in which the social factory proliferates not only sources of value extraction but also spaces of human capital development.

I now turn to a description of the net idol career of Nakamura Toyomi to show how net idols use these opportunities to develop new skills and thus pursue work they find more meaningful than their day jobs. For Toyomi, becoming a net idol was initially a strategy for breaking into the mainstream celebrity world. After a few modeling stints, however, Toyomi became disenchanted with the culture of arrogant celebrity agents. She then devoted her efforts to writing an online diary, but her writing did not attract a sizable readership. She also opened an advice corner on her website to help young men who were unsuccessful in finding girlfriends. In addition to giving advice, Toyomi handpicked clothing items and perfumes for her clients, which she presented as indispensable accessories for winning the hearts of young women. Because her efforts did not develop into a lucrative business and fulfilling form of work, she decided to develop her career as a photographer. Toyomi enjoyed taking pictures and, in the early 2000s, was able to

ride the wave of the media-touted boom of "girly" photographers ("gaari" shashinka). The genre of girly photography was a diary style of photography that centered on photos of one's self, friends, and everyday life. During the 1990s, women photographers such as Nagashima Yurie, Hiromix, and Ninagawa Mika spearheaded the trend.

Like young female photographers, most net idols photographed themselves, as opposed to having someone else take their pictures. The themes young female photographers and net idols chose to portray overlapped as well. The main difference between young female photographers and net idols was that the former did not invest in building a fan base. They became photographers and, unlike the net idols, did not experiment with various possibilities of work. Toyomi did not simply follow in the footsteps of young female photographers; she also attempted to establish a subgenre of "girly" photography that she called cell phone photography. In her diary, Toyomi often expressed the wish that her talents would be recognized. In the late 2000s, Toyomi identified a lucrative potential in photographing others in an unusual format—an activity she began calling "photo-therapy."

Photo-therapy, a practice used in private-sector counseling, involves working through problems by discussing pictures in family albums. Toyomi appropriated the term for a different use by offering to take photos of her clients in the comfort of their homes. Toyomi took hundreds of photos of clients while they went about their business at home or even ran errands in the city. She then sat with her clients to analyze the photos and to determine which ones best reflected the clients' true selves. Although she was neither a trained therapist nor a professional photographer, Toyomi integrated her interest in mental health with her love of photography to use photo-therapy to help individuals feel good about themselves and to recover aspects of their personalities that could help them achieve their goals. Taking advantage of the healing boom, she drew on a rapidly expanding literature of popular psychology to develop her practice of photo-therapy. In the summer of 2010, Toyomi told me that she had more work requests than she could fulfill during the weekends. As a result, she started contemplating whether she should quit her daytime job and devote herself to photo-therapy, an occupation that she experienced as more fulfilling than her daytime job. Toyomi's career is intriguing because it reveals how young women strove to transform

emotional labor into affective labor while using digital media as a means of human capital development.

Conclusion: Labor and Gender in the Digital Media Economy

I began my discussion of the net idol trend by invoking a contemporary symbol of cute, Ebihara Yuri. She drew my attention to the shifting forms and meanings of work when she claimed that the production of cute was a matter of hard work. Ebihara appears in several McDonald's commercials. Some of these ads feature her being seconds away from devouring a juicy hamburger, but others reference the sponsoring McDonald's only at the end of the ad and use most of the ad time to focus on Ebihara acting purely and helplessly cute. In all these ads, Ebihara sports her signature cute smile framed by impeccable crème-colored frills. Most of the Japanese viewers I asked did not register the suspense of ketchup, gravity, and Ebihara's crème-colored outfits; they were obviously used to the semantic flexibility of cute. I, however, found the implications of this semantic openness revealing for the issue of labor. When the product of an activity (in this case, cute) does not yield to easy definition, it is difficult to see this activity as a form of labor. Nonetheless, the production of cute is work.

As the center of economic gravity is shifting from manufacturing tangible goods to producing intangible commodities, it is increasingly difficult to measure value. At the same time, as affective labor is ascending in the hierarchy of laboring forms, it is becoming increasingly difficult to measure the value of labor as well. However, I do not mean to claim that the immeasurability of labor is a new problem. C. Wright Mills contemplated this issue when he argued that, in the context of white-collar work, *personality* is often more important than skills to get a job.[52] Three decades later, Arlie Hochschild famously claimed that service providers are required to perform emotional labor—to offer service with a smile—for which they are not compensated.[53] Equally important, feminist scholars have insisted that women's labor in the domestic sphere is undervalued because it has been deliberately kept privatized and excluded from the laws of the market.[54] While some observers celebrated the digital media economy as an apparatus that democratizes participation in the realm of labor,[55] others argued that

the Internet has become a mechanism that harnesses free labor by integrating individuals irrespective of their gender, race, or age in a highly efficient apparatus of value extraction.[56] The net idol phenomenon suggests that the digital media economy neither democratized labor market participation nor equally exploited the free labor of men and women. The net idols who succeeded in finding fulfilling work in the digital economy constitute a minuscule minority; the majority of net idols have disappeared from the cyber scene without a trace. There is a difference between the types of free labor men and women perform in the digital media economy. Arguably, some types of free labor open more opportunities to gain leverage in the realm of work than others. I posit that in the digital media economy, gender continues to serve as a key structuring principle for determining whose unpaid and underpaid labor will translate into self-fulfilling and paid work.

Throughout the postwar period in Japan, gender served as a readily available criterion by which a reservoir of unskilled labor could be maintained or shut down as business cycles fluctuated.[57] In the 2000s, women turned to digital media with new expectations. They hoped to find work there that could provide them with the basis for self-realization. The popular media have celebrated these women for embracing an entrepreneurial spirit. A journalist has claimed, "As the core of Japan's economy yawns its way into a second decade of stagnation, dynamism can be found on the fringes, where many of the entrepreneurs, innovators, and risk takers just happen to be women."[58] Yet, the net idol phenomenon reveals that the development of the digital economy did not unequivocally usher in the onset of a brave new world of work in which entrepreneurial spirit and courage, not gender, determined who could attain lucrative and meaningful work. In Japan, the digital economy tends to mobilize women to engage in unpaid labor. The net idol phenomenon illustrates that the digital economy has further reinforced the link between women and unpaid work that characterized the postwar period beyond the boundaries of the domestic sphere.

During the era of economic high growth, even when women worked for a wage—predominantly as office ladies—it was common for their employers to deliberately create fuzzy job descriptions. By insufficiently defining work responsibilities for office ladies, male employees could ask their female colleagues to run personal errands for them.[59] Thus, an office lady's work

emerged in continuation with the work of a homemaker. However, what I would like to highlight in this essay is that a net idol's work was also continuous with the work of the office lady and homemaker. The mobilization of these groups of women into regimes of underpaid and unpaid work has served multiple economic growth strategies. During the postwar period, the underpaid labor of office ladies helped offset the high costs of the lifetime employment system (maintained in large part for male employees), while housewives played an important role in reproducing male labor power. Although most net idols embarked on this career in search of fulfilling work, they ended up performing unpaid emotional labor, which was in high demand in a social context characterized by the soaring care deficit that followed the long recession.

The net idol phenomenon illuminates that the digital economy makes the idea of unpaid labor more acceptable by repositioning it as a prerequisite to attain lucrative and fulfilling work.[60] In reality, however, the digital economy locks individuals, and especially women, into a precarious work regime. When the school system is not equipped to prepare young people to adapt to the capriciousness of an ailing economy, digital media acquire new relevance.[61] The architects of the digital economy take over the responsibilities of teachers and career counselors. Many young people perceive unpaid work in the digital economy as the only possibility for finding meaningful work. The digital economy not only replaces traditional places of wage labor but also complements conventional spaces of human capital development. It becomes an apparatus that prepares young people for entering a precarious labor force. It socializes them to embrace the ideology of the possible. More important, it teaches them to learn skills with no resistance, to unlearn them with no remorse, and to relearn them with no resentment.

Notes

1. I use the concept of "cute" (*kawaii*) to signify a specific cultural phenomenon. *Cute* designates the production of a particular form of culture that is characterized by such features as vulnerability, childishness, purity, sweetness, weakness, inexperience, and innocence. Cute was originally a subculture that young women generated in the late 1970s. By the late 1990s, cute culture had grown into a multitrillion yen business in Japan.

2. "Ebihara Yuri," Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebihara_Yuri (accessed May 10, 2015).

3. This essay draws on interviews I conducted with current and former net idols between April 8 and June 30, 2010. I have corresponded with net idols via e-mail communication since 2007. Additionally, net idol diaries and interviews with net idols published in books and magazines have served as important sources of information for this essay.

4. Mario Tronti, *Operai e Capitale*, quoted and translated by Harry Cleaver, "The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: From Valorisation to Self-Valorisation," in *Open Marxism*, vol. 2 of *Theory and Practice*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 137; Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 57–66; Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004); Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol, UK: Wages for Housework, 1975); see also Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004); Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

5. For a study on emotional labor, see Arlie Russel Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). On affective labor, see Gabriella Lukacs, "Dreamwork: Cell Phone Novelists, Labor, and Politics in Contemporary Japan, *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2013): 44–64. See also Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 89–100; Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–51; and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 103–15.

6. See also Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

7. Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*.

8. Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Brian Moeran and Lise Skov (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1995), 220–54.

9. Employers responded to the prolonged recession by putting a freeze on hiring employees into career-track positions. Instead, they recruited new employees on temporary contracts (*haken* system). The only stipulation was that companies were not allowed to hire anyone for a period shorter than thirty days. By 2000, the number of irregular workers rose to 36 percent of the entire working population. See Takanashi Akira, "Rōdōhakenhō no Genten he Kaere" ("Revisiting the Origin of the Labor Law"), *Ōhara Shakaimondai Kenkyūjo Zasshi*, no. 604 (2009): 1–8.

10. Genda Yūji, *A Nagging Sense of Job Insecurity: The New Reality Facing Japanese Youth* (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2005).

11. Tronti, quoted in Cleaver, "Inversion of Class Perspective," 137.

12. Office ladies are clerical and secretarial employees working in large and middle-sized corporations.

13. Yoshihara Tōru, *Yūmeini narō! "Namae" de shigoto ga kuru hito no intaanetto + PRJutsu* (*How to Become Famous: The Internet and PR Strategies of People Who Are Offered Work Because of Their Reputation*) (Tokyo: Shoeisha, 2004), 101.

14. Muramatsu Takahide, *Netto aidoru* (*Net Idols*) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 2001), 8.

15. The first telecom deregulation took place in 1985 when the Japanese Telecom Business Law was amended and Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT) was privatized. In 1999, to further the deregulation of the communication industries, NTT was divided into holding companies: NTT Communications (long-distance and global), NTT East (local telephone), and NTT West (local telephone). This was called the second telecom deregulation. See Fuke Hidenori, "Structural Change and Deregulation in the Telecom Industry," 2000, http://www1.ocn.ne.jp/~kobakan/contents/dereguration_inthetelecom.html (accessed June 3, 2011; site discontinued).

16. In 2001, Yahoo! BB of SOFTBANK BB began offering an Internet service with an eight-megabit-per-second connection for a monthly flat rate of US$40 (3017 yen). Until then, other asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) services provided 1.5-megabit-per-second connections for a monthly fee of US$50 to US$70 (4,000–6,000 yen). See "Yahoo! BB," Wikipedia (Japan), ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahoo!_BB (accessed May 10, 2015).

17. Author interview with Nakamura Toyomi, Tokyo, June 19, 2010.

18. Ibid.

19. In the early 2000s, social networking sites (SNSs) and blog services began proliferating; this further simplified the building and maintenance of personal web pages. These included mixi.jp/, www.2ch.net/, blog.livedoor.com/, www.cosme.net/top/index, and gg.ameba.jp. In 2004, Rakuten Inc. introduced a new service to build personal web pages (Zenryaku Purofiru, pr.cgiboy.com/) (sites accessed May 10, 2015). This service was more popular than social networking and blog sites because it provided users with URLs. Personal web pages created through social networking and blog sites were accessible only to other registered members of the same site. In contrast, private websites are open to all Internet users or can be configured to be accessible only to a selected group of people.

20. The rationale behind hiring an agent lay in the belief that agents would protect the privacy and personal safety of net idols. In many cases, however, these agents recruited young women for work in the cybersex industry. A popular net idol agent was Minowa Keiju. Other net idol agencies include Net Idol *candy* (group.ameba.jp/group/7agl-vvrIzq3/; accessed May 10, 2015) and Sweet Netoa Jimusho Ōdishon (Sweet Net Idols Audition Agency) (group.ameba.jp/group/7agl-vvrIzq3/; accessed February 28, 2013; site discontinued). Net Idol *candy* was launched on February 5, 2011. In order to get a contract from this agency, one had to go through an audition. The number of members in 2013 was thirty. Another agency, Sweet Netoa Jimusho Ōdishon, was launched on January 28, 2011. In 2013,

this agency managed the careers of eighteen net idols. Ameba, a free website service, operated both Net Idol *candy* and still operates Sweet Netoa Jimusho Ōdishon.

21. www.netidolwosagase.com/ (accessed May 10, 2015).

22. These photo books featured the most popular net idols of 2000–2001. According to my survey, these albums featured a total of 288 net idols, whose profiles included their web addresses. In 2010, 274 of these websites were defunct, and I did not find any trace of 259 of these net idols.

23. net-idol.j-guide.info/ (accessed February 28, 2013; site discontinued).

24. In the second half of 1999, Netto Aidoru wo Sagase (Net Idol Search) began tallying votes automatically. Other ranking sites such as Netto Aidoru Rinku (Net Idol Link) were automated as well. In 2002, the Netto Aidoru o Sagase site became a registered trademark. See "Netto aidoru o sagase! No rekishi" ("History of Netto Aidoru o Sagase!"), http://www .netidolwosagase.com/contentu/history.htm (accessed February 28, 2013).

25. www.net-idol-academy.com/ (accessed May 10, 2015).

26. Paolo Virno, "Post-Fordist Semblance," trans. Max Henninger, *Substance*, issue 112, 36, no. 1 (2007): 45.

27. For police boxes redesigned as gingerbread houses, see Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," 220.

28. Ibid., 251.

29. Hochschild, *Managed Heart*, 7.

30. Ibid.

31. Yomota Inuhiko, *Kawaiiron* (*Theories of Cute*) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2006).

32. Ōtsuka Eiji, "Shōjotachi no Kawaii Tennō" ("Young Girls' Cute Emperor), in *Chūōkōron*, 103 (1988): 243–49.

33. Koga Reiko, *Kawaii no teikoku: Mōdo to media to onnanokotachi* (*Cute Heaven: Fashion, Media, and Women*) (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2009), 9–12.

34. Yomota, *Kawaiiron*.

35. Koga, *Kawaii no teikoku*.

36. Ibid., 13–17.

37. Ueno Chizuko, *Sekushii gyaru no dai kenkyū: Onna no yomi-kata, yomare-kata, yomase-kata* (*Studies on the "Sexy Gal": How to Understand the Representation of Women in Advertisements*) (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1982), 109–16. I am grateful to Fukue Natsuko, whose excellent discussion of cute pointed me to Ōtsuka's and Ueno's insights on cute. See http://hub.hku .hk/bitstream/10722/51692/6/FullText.pdf (accessed May 10, 2015).

38. "Ebi-kawaiku ikitai!" ("I Want to Live like Cute Ebihara!"), *AERA*, April 10, 2006, 38–41, 41.

39. See http://web.archive.org/web/20150110065612/http://www.kinokopress.com/inko/top.html (accessed May 10, 2015). Eris also uses the blog service FC2: http://erisinko.blog.fc2.com (accessed May 10, 2015).

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. The title is a playful reiteration of Yamada Yoji's hit television series *Otoko wa tsurai yo* (*It's Hard to Be a Man*), 1969–95.

43. Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*; Tronti, in Cleaver, "Inversion of Class Perspective."

44. James and Dalla Costa, *Power of Women*.

45. Here I draw inspiration from the work of such feminist geographers as Victoria Lawson, Maia Green, Sarah Atkinson, and Janine Wiles. These scholars are critical of theories that conceptualize care in terms of dependency, arguing that these theories reconfirm a flow of power in which the caregiver exercises control over receivers of care. Instead, they propose an understanding of care as a practice that reinforces mutuality in social relationships. See Sarah Atkinson, Victoria Lawson, and Janine Wiles, "Care of the Body: Spaces of Practice," *Social and Cultural Geography* 12, no. 6 (2011): 563–72; Maia Green and Victoria Lawson, "Recentering Care: Interrogating the Commodification of Care," *Social and Cultural Geography* 12, no. 6 (2011): 639–54; Victoria Lawson, "Geographies of Care and Responsibility," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no. 1 (2007): 1–11.

46. Umemiya Takako, *Jissen! Netto aidoru no narikata, yarikata, kasegikata: Houmu pe-ji kaisetsu kara anzen kanri made* (*How to Become a Net Idol, How to Become Successful, and How to Make Money out of It: From Creating a Home Page to Safe Management*) (Tokyo: Bug News Network, 2001).

47. The contemporary entertainment industry primarily uses *iyashi-kei* to refer to young female idols of every stripe, from mainstream *tarento* (celebrity) to bikini models. See "Iyashi būmu no kōsatsu" ("Discussion of the Iyashi Boom"), machika.oops.jp/healingframe.htm (accessed May 10, 2015). See also the Japanese Wikipedia on "iyashi," ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%99%92%E3%81%97 (accessed February 28, 2013).

48. Lukacs, "Dreamwork."

49. Michel Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009): 21–41.

50. www.yokoegg.com/index.html (accessed May 10, 2015).

51. Examples of net idols who launched careers as models include Kozue Haruna, Sakai Rika, Nagaike Natsuko, Yoko, and Tsukimiya Usagi: respectively, ameblo.jp/kozueharuna/ (accessed May 10, 2015); http://www.sakai-rika.com/profile.html (accessed August 20, 2011; site discontinued); ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%B0%B8%E6%B1%A0%E5%8D%97%E6%B4%A5%E5%AD%90 (accessed May 10, 2015); blog.livedoor.jp/yokochannel/ (accessed May 10, 2015); and usagi-moon.com/prof.html (accessed May 10, 2015). Net idols who became singers include Suzuki Yasuka, Hina, and Aikawa: http://www.yasuka.cc/ (accessed August 20, 2011; site discontinued); hina2008.jugem.jp/ (accessed May 10, 2015). An example of a net idol who became a scriptwriter is Sakurai Ryon, aka Yamamoto Akari, http://www.jah.ne.jp/~ryoryo/akari.html (accessed August 20, 2011; site discontinued). Inozuka Shino became an illustrator: http://again789.fc2web.com/index.html (accessed August 20, 2011; site discon-

tinued); and Nakamura Toyomi and Mizunagi Ren became photographers: www.toyomi
.org/ (accessed May 10, 2015); and www.page.sannet.ne.jp/hatue/index.html (accessed May
10, 2015). Net idols who became adult video stars include Kikōden Misa and Hōjō Rara:
blog.dmm.co.jp/actress/kikouden_misa/ (accessed May 10, 2015).

52. C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1951).

53. Hochschild, *Managed Heart*.

54. James and Dalla Costa, *Power of Women*; Leopoldina Fortunati, "Immaterial Labor and Its
Machinization," *ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007): 139–57; Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American:
The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

55. Julian Dibbell, *Play Money: Or, How I Quit My Day Job and Made Millions Trading Virtual
Loot* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

56. Terranova, *Network Culture*.

57. Mary Brinton, *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan* (Berke-
ley: University of California Press, 1993).

58. Takehiko Kambayashi, "Women Work Way Up in Japan; Entrepreneurial Spirit Helps Lift
Ailing Economy," *Washington Times*, July 26, 2002.

59. Yuko Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Com-
panies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 74–75.

60. This is very similar to what we see in other East Asian contexts, such as the internship pro-
grams in China. See Pun Ngai and Anita Koo, "A 'World-Class' (Labor) Camp/us" in this
issue.

61. Mary Brinton, *Lost in Transition: Youth, Work, and Instability in Postindustrial Japan* (Cam-
bridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).